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# British Birds

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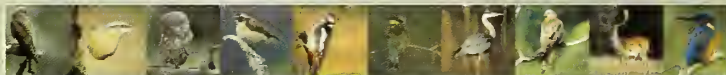
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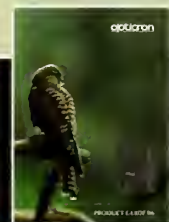
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Volume 100 • Number 1 • January 2007


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## The first 100 years

Strictly speaking, this editorial should have appeared in the June 2007 issue, when *British Birds* will be truly 100 years old. For practical purposes, however, we have decided to celebrate *BB*'s centenary throughout 2007 and Vol. 100 of the journal. There are so many things to look back on during the first 100 years, a mixture of milestones and watersheds, high points and low, new dawns and false dawns. For many years, *BB* has used the occasional series 'Looking back' to give readers a flavour of the journal 25, 50 or 75 years ago. Both the differences and the similarities between the British ornithological scene at those earlier times and now are thought-provoking. Fifty years ago, the June 1957 issue, as well as containing an editorial entitled 'The First Fifty Years', included a paper (by R. A. Richardson, M. J. Seago and A. C. Church) describing a new species for the British List in Norfolk, Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*, and another paper, by A. W. Boyd, entitled 'Sewage-farms as bird-habitats'. Given what has happened since to both Collared Doves and sewage-farms, these events seem truly from another age.

Yet not everything changes so dramatically, and going back to the very first issue of *BB*, in June 1907, it is reassuring to discover a format of main papers, notes, letters and reviews that has both stood the test of time and served this journal well. The topics covered are by no means so outdated that their only value is in historical terms either – a note by J. H. Gurney on the numbers of birds (mainly wintering Pink-footed Geese *Anser brachyrhynchus*) struck by lightning during a severe storm in north Norfolk in February 1906 would merit publication today. The June 1907 issue began with an account by Howard Saunders of a number of recent additions to the British List, another format with which regular *BB* readers will be familiar. The unmasking of the 'Hastings Rarities' affair removed many of the species that Saunders described, however, and this provides a neat link with both June 1957 and the first article in this issue. James Ferguson-Lees was executive editor of *BB* in 1957, and a significant contributor to setting the Hastings affair

straight. I am delighted that James has also co-authored the first article in this volume (along with Malcolm Ogilvie and Richard Chandler, former and present members of the *BB* editorial board respectively), which takes a more detailed look back at the history of *BB*, and its development during the past century.

Looking to the future, the 'History of *British Birds*' article is the first in a series of papers to mark our centenary; there will be one in most issues in the coming year, from a range of renowned authors, and I feel certain that it will be a series that readers will relish. This will not affect the flow of regular papers (although it is likely to mean more than an average number of pages in some issues!), nor of regular reports. With regard to the latter, the slippage in publishing schedule of some key reports will not have gone unnoticed, with part 1 of the BBRC report for 2005 appearing only now, in January 2007, and no Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP) report since October 2004, the report for 2002. In both cases, this has reflected a changeover in secretary/compiler and, also in both cases, the replacement of a long-serving incumbent has not been easy. Nonetheless, it is fully intended that the schedule for both reports will return to normal this year. The BBRC report for 2005 will be split into two parts to facilitate a more detailed summary of all 17 species for which this will be the last report; the 2006 report should be published towards the end of Vol. 100, and will once more appear in a single issue. A combined 2003/04 RBBP report is planned for June 2007, and it is hoped to publish a 2005 report later this year too. As for the Scarce Migrants report, it is intended to combine the 2004 and 2005 reports and publish them together in 2008, partly to prevent a surfeit of annual reports dominating the pages of *BB* this year.

Whether or not, in due course, a future *BB* editor will be chewing a pencil and drafting 'The first 200 years' remains to be seen – but the quality and quantity of material that is now being submitted to *BB* certainly bodes well for the immediate future of the journal.

Roger Riddington



# A history of British Birds

Malcolm Ogilvie, James Ferguson-Lees  
and Richard Chandler

## Introduction

As the statement on the inside front cover – ‘Established 1907, incorporating The Zoologist, established 1843’ – confirms, *BB* will be celebrating its centenary this year, and this article is the first in a series to be published in Vol. 100 to celebrate that event. How did *BB* come into being, and how has it changed over the years? We hope that a review of where *BB* has come from, coupled with a statement of plans for the future, will, given that this is our centenary year, be both timely and of interest to our readers. The preparation of this history began some years ago. We turned initially to an editorial on ‘The First Fifty Years’ published in *BB* in June 1957 – at which time one of us (IJF-L) was already involved with the journal. That provided an excellent start and some of its contents are repeated here. In the past, we were also able to have extended conversations with E. M. (Max) Nicholson, who was for so long involved with the journal, and Anthony Witherby, who had taken over the publishing company on the death of his uncle, H. F. Witherby. As always, the editors invite comments and suggestions but, most particularly this year, they encourage readers to add to this history by providing their own memories of their time as subscribers to *BB*.

## Before 1907

It seems pertinent to look back a little before 1907 and examine the seeds from which *BB* germinated. H. F. (‘Harry’) Witherby was a partner, with his father and younger brother, in a London stationery manufacturing and printing firm, founded by his great-great-grandfather in 1740. The move by the firm into publishing came in the 1890s with the acquisition of the quarterly record of the Royal Navy, *The Royal Navy List*. In 1892, the firm acquired *Knowledge*, ‘an illustrated magazine of Science, Literature and Art’, which seems to have been a Victorian self-improvement publication fairly typical of its time. Almost immediately, and

even before he joined the firm as a partner in 1894 at the age of 21, Harry Witherby began contributing ornithological articles, including some which, after rewriting, would become chapters of his first book, *Forest Birds, their Haunts and Habits: short studies from nature*, based on his experiences in the New Forest where he grew up. *Forest Birds*, a small volume of 98 pages and with some 30 illustrations, was not produced by Witherby & Co., then yet to start book-publishing, but by Kegan Paul.

Harry Witherby was, from an early age, a keen naturalist – though it is unclear where this interest came from. He was certainly both a good observer and interested in communicating what he had seen. In October 1897, he introduced what was to become a regular section in *Knowledge*, entitled ‘British Ornithological

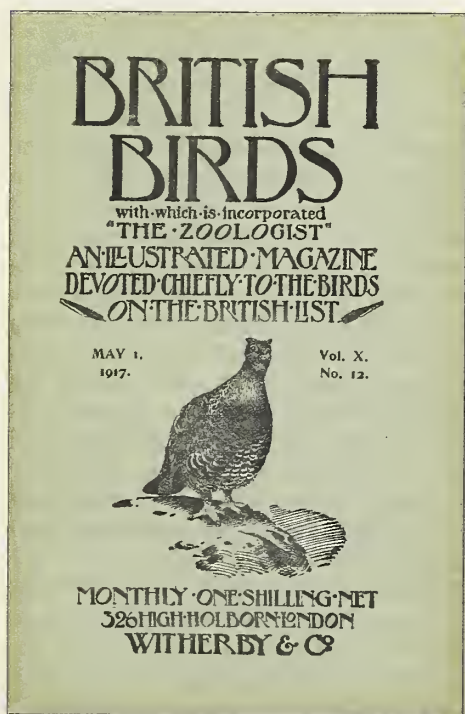
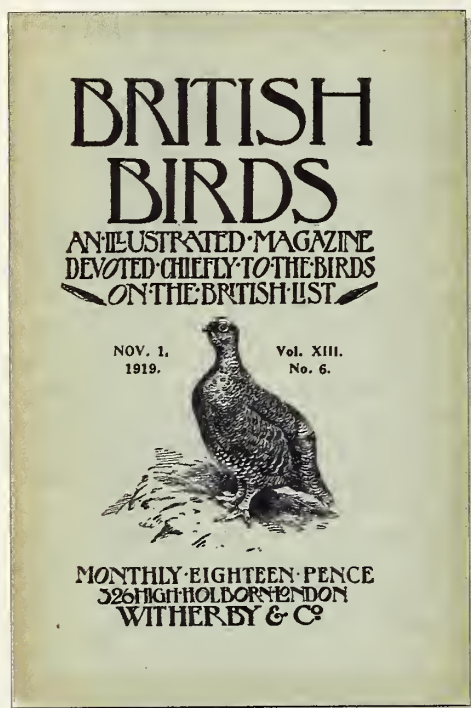


Fig. 1. May 1917. 1917 marked the first year of the incorporation of *The Zoologist* with *BB*.



**Fig. 2.** November 1919. By 1919, the original grouse drawing had been changed and the reference to *The Zoologist* dropped from the front cover, though retained on the contents list. The price had also risen, from one shilling to eighteen pence.

Notes'. The second of these, which appeared in February 1898, comprised two notes sent in by readers – on Wigeon *Anas penelope* nesting in Yorkshire, complete with a photograph of the nest, and on a Hoopoe *Upupa epops* shot in Sussex. Witherby both commented on these and added some information of his own on early nesting of birds in December 1897, as well as brief notices of the occurrence of several rare birds – all, naturally enough at that time, having been shot or, euphemistically, 'taken'. The similarities are sufficiently striking to show that this was obviously the progenitor of the 'Notes' section of *BB*. It seems highly probable that an increasing flood of letters and notes from the readers of *Knowledge* was one of the stimuli that caused Witherby to consider founding a journal devoted solely to birds.

Before *BB* first appeared, however, Witherby & Co. were moving into book-publishing, again led by Harry Witherby's interest in birds. His account of his journey along the White Nile in Sudan, *Bird Hunting on the White Nile*, appeared in 1902 with the publishing imprint of 'The Office of Knowledge', showing the con-

tinuing importance of that magazine in the company's affairs. Bird books continued to dominate the firm's book-publishing venture, and some 30 titles, nearly all on birds, had appeared by 1913. One of the earliest, J. E. Kelsall and P. W. Munn's *The Birds of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight* (1905), attracted a subscription list of 270 before publication and founded Witherby's long tradition of producing county avifaunas.

It should perhaps be recorded that, as well as being a fine field naturalist, Harry Witherby was a taxonomist of note, and his earlier ornithological activities were devoted primarily to the collection and study of skins; from these stemmed his interest in plumage changes and moult, on which he was to become a leading authority. His collection of skins eventually totalled over 9,000. He travelled extensively on collecting trips, destinations including the Kola Peninsula in Russia, Persia (now Iran) and Sudan, the results being published in *Ibis*, and he was one of the first British ornithologists to visit the now famous Coto Doñana in Spain, in spring 1898, the year of the Spanish-American War. His diary of that trip was at one time held in the *BB* editorial office and it was fascinating to read of his difficulties at that time in distinguishing *Sylvia* warblers in the field. Even his honeymoon, in Algeria, was combined with collecting, and his wife accompanied him on several subsequent trips to Spain. He thus developed a very considerable knowledge of birds in Britain, Europe and farther afield, and allied this to a desire to see information about British birds advanced by systematic investigation based on good science. The fact that his business involved the invaluable possession of a printing and publishing firm meant that he could hardly have been better qualified or placed to produce a new journal devoted to British birds.

### *The first fifty years*

The June 1957 editorial in *BB* described how, early in 1907, H. F. Witherby approached friends and fellow ornithologists for support for his project to found a monthly journal devoted to the study of British birds. It also reprinted the original concepts expressed by Witherby about the scope and purpose of the new journal, demonstrating the remarkable grasp that Witherby had of the way forward for ornithology. His ideas embraced, for the first

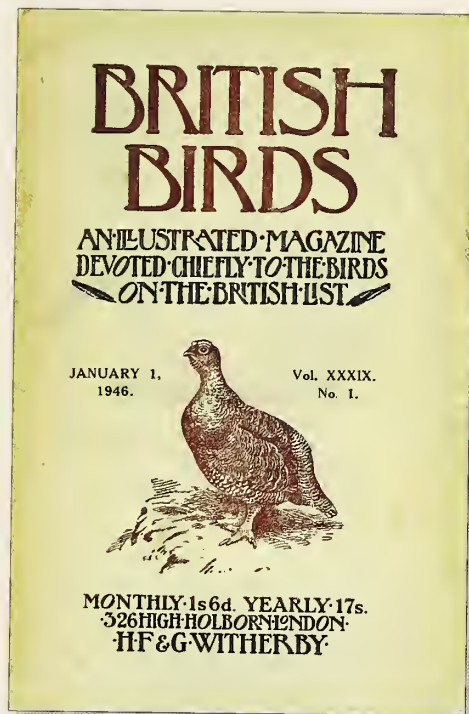


time, the concept of amateur ornithological involvement in field studies and surveys.

Among the more significant events during those 50 years, the first of all was a note from Victor Wilson, published in only the second issue, in July 1907, which put forward an idea 'to trap birds and mark them, by a metal ring or otherwise'; this was accompanied by an editorial comment supportive of such a scheme. Thus, in those early days, *BB* clearly fulfilled roles that in future years were to be taken up by others, most notably the British Trust for Ornithology. With commendable alacrity the 'British Birds Marking Scheme', the first of its kind in the world, was launched in January 1909; it is now, of course, administered by the BTO. In a similar manner, the National Census of Heronries was launched in 1928 by Max Nicholson under the auspices of *BB*, which published the first report in 1929; this also is now administered by the BTO and continues to set new markers as the longest-running bird census in the world.

In January 1916 came the incorporation with *BB* of *The Zoologist*. That publication had been founded by Edward Newman (also a publisher) in 1832, originally as *The Entomological Magazine*, subsequently becoming *The Entomologist* and, in 1843, *The Zoologist*. From its emergence in 1843, and particularly from the 1850s, *The Zoologist* regularly published notes on birds, much as *BB* did from the beginning and, indeed, still does. It appears that the success of *BB* was the death knell for *The Zoologist*: as W. R. P. (Bill) Bourne succinctly put it, '*British Birds* had got a progressive editor, Harry Witherby, and it [*The Zoologist*] had not' (*Brit. Birds* 88: 1–4).

Harry Witherby was, as the editorial in 1957 put it, 'much more than the Editor of *British Birds*'. His death was a truly great loss, and it is difficult to imagine one man ever again playing such a leading role in British ornithology. Again to quote the 1957 editorial, 'his contribution was [because of the war] never fully assessed... it was not only immense but pervasive and incalculable.' Arguably, Witherby's greatest achievement was *The Handbook of British Birds* (1938–41). Though not directly associated with *BB*, *The Handbook* was written by H. F. Witherby, Rev. F. C. R. Jourdain, Norman F. Ticehurst and Bernard W. Tucker. Jourdain and Ticehurst had become assistant editors of *BB* in June 1909 and Tucker joined the board in June

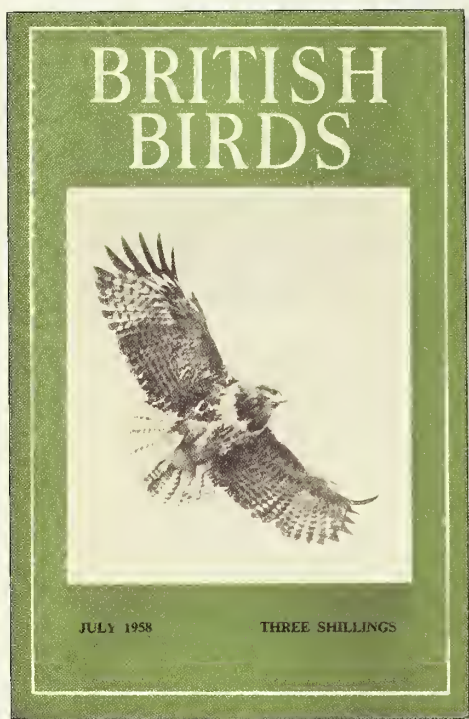


**Fig. 3.** January 1946. Although 27 years (including the Second World War) had passed since 1919, the cover of *BB* was almost exactly the same, apart from the use of brown ink for the heading and the grouse emblem and the alteration in the name of the firm (and minor changes in the style of the date and price). The price itself, however, remained unchanged at 1s 6d per issue.

1940. Thus, the four authors of *The Handbook* were the four editors of *BB*, and the publishers were H. F. & G. Witherby Ltd. This five-volume work had an enormous influence on bird-watchers until its place was finally taken by the publication of *Birds of the Western Palearctic* (1977–94). There are many, however, who still regard Witherby's own detailed plumage descriptions in *The Handbook* as unsurpassed. Moreover, it was Bernard Tucker's beautifully concise and yet comprehensive sections on 'Field-characters and General Habits' that began the great advances in field identification that were to snowball as the interest in watching grew after the Second World War. Another of Witherby's many achievements was, with such young lions as Max Nicholson, the part he played in the setting up of the BTO in the 1930s.

Witherby died in December 1943 and, in the February 1944 issue of *BB*, Bernard Tucker was named as the new editor. In April 1944, A. W.





**Fig. 4.** July 1958. By 1958, the cover had been completely altered and a monochrome photograph of a different bird was used each month.

(Arnold) Boyd joined Ticehurst on the editorial board – Jourdain had died in 1940 – and other ornithological figures of the day, including two of the Alexander brothers (H. G. and W. B.), the Misses Evelyn Baxter and Leonora Rintoul (the remarkable ‘good ladies’ of Scottish ornithology), David Lack and Max Nicholson, to name but a few, became involved in an advisory capacity.

Bernard Tucker continued the high standard of his predecessor. Harry Witherby’s two sons and his nephew, Anthony, while maintaining the commitment of the firm to ornithological publications, were not themselves birdwatchers and could not be expected to have the same personal sense of attachment to the journal. Nevertheless, Tucker persuaded them to make several changes during his relatively brief tenure as editor, including from 1946 to coincide the volumes with the calendar year, instead of June to May, and also to use many more monochrome photographs, especially for the excellent – and eventually long-running – series entitled ‘Studies of some species rarely photographed’, which began in that year. There were, indeed, few bird photographers of the post-war decades

whose work did not appear at some time in the pages of *BB*.

But Tucker’s longest battles with the publishers were over the journal’s size. Although the number of pages per volume had climbed from an all-time low of 248 pages in the 1943/44 volume, perhaps a consequence of paper rationing at that time, it was still only a total of 384 pages, or 32 per month, in 1947. In 1948, the addition of a 42-page supplement – by M. N. Rankin and E. A. G. Duffey on ‘A Study of the Bird Life of the North Atlantic’ – helped to raise this sharply, to 450 pages. Nevertheless, Tucker remained restricted in how many 40-page issues he was allowed per year, this being linked to the publishers’ reluctance to raise the annual subscription, though they finally increased it from one pound per annum to one guinea at the end of 1950 – just about the time when Tucker died, at the age of just 50.

Bernard Tucker had been editor for less than seven years, but his impact on British ornithology in that period and through his work for *The Handbook* was considerable. He always encouraged young birdwatchers whom he met in the field. One such was IJF-L, who in 1943 ran into him by chance at Northampton sewage-farm – a magnet for birdwatchers, as were most of the old-fashioned sewage-farms in those days – and thereafter by arrangement fairly regularly. After a period in the Department of Zoology and Comparative Anatomy, Tucker was appointed Reader in Ornithology at Oxford, the first in any British university, and many graduates and undergraduates there during and after the war had reason to be grateful for Bernard Tucker’s help and advice. This is recognised by the annual Tucker Memorial Lectures in Oxford since 1951, some of the most recent of which have subsequently been published in *BB*. He will be remembered, too, for his remarkably neat handwriting, which complemented his art of writing pertinently and concisely. Another memorial to Tucker was the institution by the BTO in 1953 of the Bernard Tucker Medal, awarded annually for outstanding recent work by a member of the Trust through contributions to its scientific work or its surveys.

Among the problems which Tucker had faced during his editorship, one in particular became increasingly acute, stemming from the growing popularity of birdwatching, which at that time began a post-war expansion from a compara-

tively rare eccentricity into a national pastime. From a manageable and relatively steady flow of papers and notes, the material being sent to *BB* began to turn into a flood, which threatened to overwhelm the editor. This led to the appointment in 1949 as Tucker's part-time assistant of J. D. (Duncan) Wood, a master at Leighton Park School, Reading. He had been secretary of the Oxford Ornithological Society in the 1930s at the same time as Tucker was president. He was paid a (small) monthly fee by Witherbys to handle many of the chores of routine editorial work and correspondence. This developed, as Bernard Tucker became ill, into his carrying out a major part of the editorial work. (Duncan Wood died as recently as March 2006, at the grand old age of 95; see *Brit. Birds* 99: 387–388.) As already noted, Bernard Tucker had two associate editors, N. F. Ticehurst and A. W. Boyd, and a number of consultants, to advise him on the suitability of papers and choice of material, but they were not able to give him much help in actual preparation for publication. When Tucker died, however, Arnold Boyd stepped into the breach and became *de facto* acting editor, with Duncan Wood continuing as assistant. Between them, they managed to keep the journal appearing monthly, though often somewhat late.

'The First Fifty Years' editorial pointed out how the rather few surviving ornithologists who had worked with both Harry Witherby and Bernard Tucker rallied round and ensured the continued survival of *BB*. What are not mentioned are some of the other possibilities discussed at the time. There was a real fear that publication might cease altogether and, with this in mind, it was proposed by a number of people that *BB* should become the official organ of the BTO. Although *BB* was publishing the results of many of the BTO surveys and reports, the idea did not find favour. Arnold Boyd expressed the contrary view that, while there was certainly a considerable overlap in the readership of *BB* and the membership of the BTO, the two institutions, though closely allied, did not have identical interests. He also doubted whether *BB* would be able to accommodate the increasing number of scientific papers emerging from BTO enquiries and still maintain its other services to ornithology. In the event, that organisation's own journal, *Bird Study*, was launched in 1954.

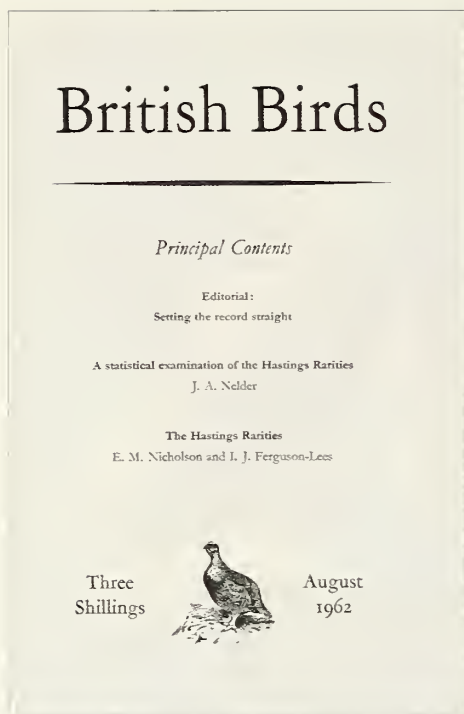
Another suggestion for the future of *BB*, put



**Fig. 5.** March 1959. In 1959, the cover had been redesigned by a professional artist (not a bird artist) enlisted by the publishers. The design was based on the Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* photograph used on the cover of the July 1958 issue (fig. 4), but the flight feathers on one wing overlap wrongly – so much so that, as was pointed out by several readers, the bird could not have flown!

forward by Duncan Wood, was that it should have a Board of Trustees, comprising representatives of the British Ornithologists' Union, the BTO, the Edward Grey Institute (EGI) at Oxford and the RSPB, as well as the publishers, Witherbys. He put this idea to Boyd and Ticehurst, and received a reply from the latter which, while approving strongly of the proposal, took issue with the inclusion of the RSPB among the organisations to be represented, with the words: 'regards a representative of the RSPB, I cannot see any utility or justification for including that Society which, as such, has never done any scientific bird work at all.' This somewhat unfair and nowadays wholly inappropriate comment perhaps reflected a much earlier outlook. Indeed, there would have been a time when the RSPB would probably have been reluctant to have anything to do with a journal edited by Harry Witherby, who had collected large numbers of birds and, in the shape of F. C. R. Jourdain, had an assistant editor who remained an egg-collector to the end of his





**Fig. 6.** August 1962. The buzzard drawing (fig. 5) had been removed after just one year and the style shown by this very simple cover, based on the main contents, was used for nine years with just the background colour changing annually. August 1962 has been selected here because that was a special 104-page issue dealing with the 'Hastings Rarities' (see text).

days. The RSPB thus tended to equate scientific ornithology with collecting, which was at least partly true, and so had periods of quite strong anti-science, while the scientists of the time regarded that body as no more than a lot of somewhat sentimental bird-lovers.

The new arrangements finally decided upon to fill the gap left by Bernard Tucker took just under two months to be brought into being, with an announcement of the new editorial board appearing in the March 1951 issue. Such a speedy outcome undoubtedly owed much to the fact that Max Nicholson had worked closely with Harry Witherby, and was therefore known in person and by reputation to the Witherby directors. Max Nicholson became chairman of the new board of editors (the 'senior editor'), where he was joined by the previous associate and assistant editors, Arnold Boyd, N. F. Ticehurst and Duncan Wood, and by two new members, Wilfrid B. Alexander (generally known as 'W. B.') and P. A. D. (Phil) Hollom.

The new board was able to produce a 440-page volume that year and also to begin publishing some of the backlog of accumulated papers, notes and book reviews which had built up substantially during Bernard Tucker's last year. An editorial in the May 1951 issue also flagged up what had become a major concern of Bernard Tucker's shortly before his death, namely the problems associated with the increasing numbers of field-identifications of rarities and the need for their more critical examination. Examples came to light of reports published in *BB* which had been rejected or at least put in square brackets by the county recorder in the relevant local report, and vice versa.

The idea of improved arrangements for dealing with rarities was in the minds of other ornithologists, too. In a letter dated 17th January 1951, David Lack had written to Arnold Boyd and suggested the formation of a committee 'for the consideration of records of rare birds before they are published. This committee should be closely linked with the BOU List Committee, and should keep in close touch with local Natural History Societies.' He went on to say how some records were submitted only to *BB* while others, equally interesting, went only to local journals, and that in the latter cases the vetting could be very variable. He advocated treating all records of rare birds equally. He concluded, 'I feel that if a committee was set up, its decision would give much more weight to the records published in *BB* than is at present the case.' The *BB* Rarities Committee was not, however, set up until 1959 (see below).

IJF-L's name first appeared on the title page of *BB* in June 1952, and remained there until 1979. Also a schoolmaster in the early 1950s, like Duncan Wood, he was invited to join as part-time assistant editor in 1952, when Duncan Wood obtained a post overseas. The workload was far too heavy, however, and in 1954 he gave up teaching to take up the appointment of executive editor, a post he was to hold for 19 years. A number of significant developments took place during his period as executive editor. First and foremost was the formation of the *BB* Rarities Committee, or BBRC: a committee of ten – who soon became teasingly known as the 'Ten Rare Men' – was devised and set up jointly by Phil Hollom, who became its first chairman, and IJF-L. (An article describing more fully the history of BBRC, its

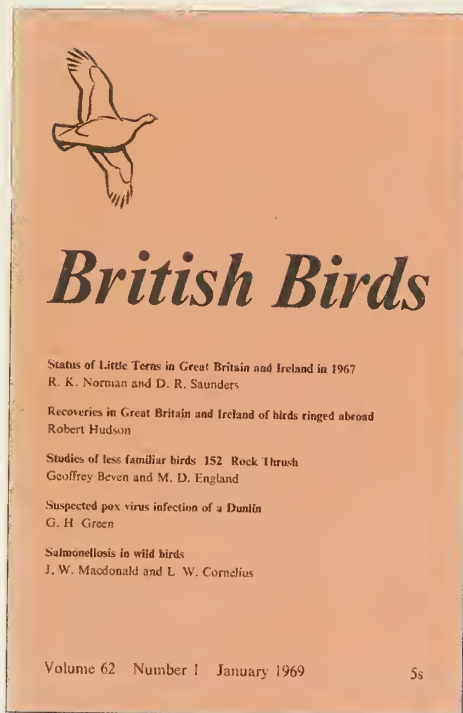
publications and procedures, will be published in the March 2007 issue.)

This was followed by the setting-up of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP), which IJF-L devised with David Lea, then Deputy Director (Conservation) of the RSPB. The first RBBP report, for the year 1973, was written by J. T. R. (Tim) Sharrock, at that time the BTO's representative on the Panel, and published in 1975. Max Nicholson and IJF-L also saw the need, as a follow-up to the formation of the BBRC, for closer co-operation with editors of county bird reports. In the early 1960s they organised and were the introductory speakers at two one-day conferences; these led eventually to the formation, by Mike Rogers, of the Association of County Recorders and Editors (ACRE). Among other things, IJF-L introduced 'Recent reports and news' (as an offshoot of his monthly broadcasts in the *Countryside* programme) and was, with George Yeates and then Eric Hosking, responsible for developing what had started out as 'Studies of some species rarely photographed' into 'Studies of less familiar birds'. He thinks that perhaps his greatest memorial is the fact that the design of the annual *BB* Index – or 'Comprehensive Index' when it was launched in 1953 – still follows almost exactly the format that he developed with Diana Blamire (née Giffard) and which, much later, was carried on by MAO; they say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and even the layout of the binding instructions and booking form have hardly changed in more than 50 years.

#### *Since 1957: the editorial board, Macmillan Journals and BB Ltd*

In the January 1960 issue of *BB*, it was announced that Max Nicholson, while remaining on the editorial board, was handing over the post of senior editor to Phil Hollom and that both N. F. Ticehurst and Arnold Boyd were being given a title of honorary editor, in effect signalling their retirement. To replace them, the editorial board invited Stanley Cramp, who had already established himself as an outstanding amateur ornithologist, to join them. Another change was also announced in the same editorial: George Yeates, who had been appointed the journal's first photographic editor in 1954, was handing over to Eric Hosking.

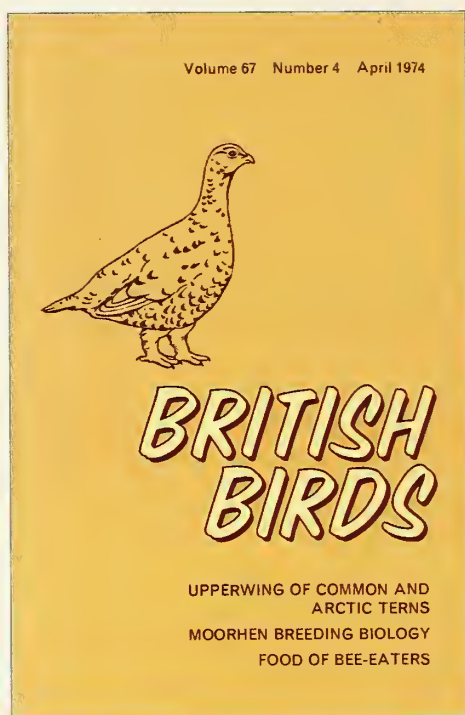
It is questionable whether formal editorial meetings had ever been held before this time,



**Fig. 7.** January 1969. This was the first issue using a design that was to last for five years, again with an annual change of paper colour. Like the previous design, it listed the main contents, but for the first time the emblem showed a grouse in flight.

though IJF-L had long had regular discussions with Max Nicholson in the latter's office at the Nature Conservancy, and they both met Phil Hollom at various ornithological talks and conferences, as well as at the monthly meetings in London of the 1937 Bird Club, of which Stanley Cramp was also a member. From 1960, however, probably at Cramp's instigation, monthly *BB* editorial meetings were held at a quiet restaurant in Soho and these continued for the next ten years. They would last about three hours and were part formal, part discussion of ornithological topics in general, and many developments not directly concerned with *BB* grew out of them. Probably the most important of these followed a discussion about *The Handbook* and the problem that, after a quarter of a century, it was becoming – in parts at least – increasingly out of date. IJF-L was asked to produce a paper on what should be the aims of a new 'Handbook', what it might involve in terms of research and some of the pitfalls to be avoided. At the next meeting, Max Nicholson proposed that, because British birdwatchers were by then frequently travelling in Europe





**Fig. 8.** April 1974. Five years later the grouse had landed again, in a new design that lasted only through 1975 (when it and the cover were blue).

and North Africa, the boundaries of the area covered by the new handbook should be extended from Britain & Ireland alone to take in the whole of the Western Palearctic. That was how *BWP* was born and the four *BB* editors became the first directors of West Palearctic Birds Ltd. Species lists were drawn up, the team enlarged, and the subject aired in open discussion at the IOC in Oxford in 1966 and in The Netherlands in 1970.

Those editorial meetings in the 1960s also led to other things. In and after that decade, Stanley Cramp and IJF-L were closely involved with the BTO, RSPB and BOU in various capacities, and Max Nicholson was not only director-general of the Nature Conservancy (until 1966), but also a founder member of the World Wildlife Fund, conservation-convenor for the International Biological Programme, vice-president of the Wildfowl Trust, and a former officer of all the other British ornithological bodies. The fourth editor in that decade, Phil Hollom – the ‘quiet man’ of post-war British ornithology – was one of the authors of the first (and, at that time, by far the most used) of the European field guides, *The Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* (Petersen *et al.* 1954); and also author of

*The Popular Handbook* (1952) and *The Popular Handbook of Rarer British Birds* (1960), both condensed updates of Witherby’s *Handbook*.

Thus, apart from *BWP*, other major subjects were explored during those *BB* editorial meetings in the 1960s. Following the publication of the *Atlas of the British Flora* (Perring & Walters 1962), one such subject was the feasibility of grid-mapping British bird distributions, which was being raised, with much opposition, in the committees of the BTO. The discussion at the *BB* editorial meeting helped to convince IJF-L to support the proposal strongly at the BTO Council, as a result of which he was appointed chairman of the Atlas Working Group that oversaw the organisation of the first *Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland* (Sharrock 1976). Another topic was that of reintroductions – now very much in vogue, but not in those days – which led to the presentation by Stanley Cramp and IJF-L of what was probably the first paper to the RSPB on this subject.

At the beginning of 1963, Stanley Cramp had taken over as senior editor from Phil Hollom, though the latter remained as a board member. Cramp was to hold this position right through until his death in 1987 (*Brit. Birds* 81: 10–13), making him the longest-serving senior editor after Harry Witherby (1907–43), though N. F. Ticehurst had been a member of the board from 1909 to 1957 and, more recently, David Christie was assistant editor from 1973 to 2002 (see below).

After this period of calm, the 1970s brought several changes and at least one major crisis. In 1970, when publication was often late, sometimes by a month or more, Pat Bonham joined the editorial board as assistant to IJF-L. Then, as announced in the January 1972 issue, Max Nicholson and Phil Hollom decided to step down and, in their places, Ian Wallace and MAO joined the board. Ian Wallace was, and is, a well-known and skilled amateur, who had at that time recently become chairman of BBRC, while MAO was then a research scientist at what is now the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust at Slimbridge, thus becoming the first full-time professional ornithologist to be appointed to the editorial board.

At the end of January 1973, IJF-L resigned as executive editor to join the staff of the RSPB and also to give him more time to work on *BWP*, but he agreed to remain on the editorial board and did so until 1979. His erstwhile assis-

tant, Pat Bonham, was appointed as executive editor in his place. At that point, David Christie joined as assistant editor – a position he was to hold until March 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 95: 214–215). A tower of strength throughout that time, Christie became acting editor on two occasions: first in 1975/76, following the resignation of Pat Bonham in July 1975, and again in 2000/01, during the interregnum between Tim Sharrock and Roger Riddington.

In 1973 this new team had barely had time to settle when Witherby & Co. dropped a bombshell in their laps with the announcement that the firm could no longer afford to support *BB*. Circulation was down and the journal was clearly losing money. This became one (of many) of Stanley Cramp's finest hours. Single-handedly, and with a minimum of consultation with his colleagues – in his latter years not an unusual method of working on his part – he negotiated the sale of *BB* to a new publisher, Macmillan. This firm had a substantial journals division and Cramp persuaded the directors that *BB* would sit comfortably alongside the likes of *Nature* and *Nursing Times*. He also clearly hoped that, as proved to be the case, Macmillan would be prepared to invest in promoting the journal and boosting its circulation to a more profitable state.

In July 1976, the editorial board, and Macmillan, appointed Tim Sharrock as managing editor, fresh from the recent success of organising, for the BTO, the first *Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland* (1976). One of the first major changes to *BB* overseen by Sharrock was a complete redesign of the journal, with new typography throughout. It also now became possible for the whole journal to be printed on art paper, thus allowing photographic illustrations to appear in their appropriate places, instead of, as before, confined to inserted pages in the middle. Ian Wallace resigned from the editorial board at the end of 1978, because of pressure of other work, and his place was filled by Peter Grant, another keen and knowledgeable amateur, who in 1976 had also taken over from Wallace as chairman of BBRC.

The four editors, Stanley Cramp, MAO, Peter Grant and Tim Sharrock, were faced with a considerable new challenge in 1980, when Macmillan Journals decided that they wished to dispose of *BB*. A review of costs led Macmillan to conclude that the journal was not sufficiently



**Fig. 9.** October 1976. By 1976, monochrome photographs had returned to the cover, now bled off.

profitable. With remarkable foresight, Sharrock, when negotiating his contract with Macmillan, had managed to include a clause giving him first option to purchase the whole journal, and this, with the advice and encouragement of Cramp and the other editorial board members, was put into effect. A new company, British Birds Ltd, was formed for the purpose, with the four members of the editorial board equal shareholders and directors. The new company's aims and objectives were set out in an editorial in the August 1980 issue entitled '*BB* goes independent'. These aims were to manage *BB* for the benefit of British ornithology, with the company being run on a non-profit basis and any surplus devoted to providing a better journal.

Three more editorial changes took place in the period up to 1996. Peter Grant resigned in July 1987 and was replaced by RJC, who had been one of the journal's photographic consultants since 1980. With the death of Stanley Cramp in August 1987, the position of 'senior editor' was abolished, and the use of the senior editor's name on the spine of bound copies was discontinued. Robin Prytherch, who had had a long career as a producer of natural history pro-





**Fig. 10.** July 1978. In 1978, line-drawings replaced the photographs and the principal contents reappeared on the front cover.

grammes for the BBC, succeeded Cramp on the editorial board. Finally, the board size was increased to five in July 1992 with the appointment of Rob Hume, then (and still) editor of the RSPB's *Birds* magazine and, from 1993 to 1997, chairman of BBRC.

#### *Other important publishing developments*

Selecting from the wealth of topics covered in the last 50 years is no easy matter, so much is of interest. Perhaps the single most important event of the late 1950s was the appearance of the ecological sketches of the Coto Doñana and the Camargue, which helped to mark at least the beginning of the end of the insularity which had been apparent in much British ornithology (*Brit. Birds* 51: 1–23, 321–350). These seminal papers also broadened the scope of the journal, containing, as they did, much that was not strictly about birds, even though a proper understanding of the latter benefited greatly from the more ecological material included.

The 1950s and the 1960s were also noteworthy for the number of papers about bird migration, stemming particularly from Kenneth Williamson's theories of drift migration across the North Sea. It is now understood that some

of his hypotheses were based on inadequate data and revealed as such only by later radar studies. Nevertheless, his papers were eagerly anticipated and read, and stimulated much interest in migration studies, as well as giving a considerable boost to the establishment of bird observatories and coastal ringing sites, which have continued to reveal much of value and interest.

In 1962, the entire August issue – no fewer than 104 pages – was devoted to the 'Hastings Rarities' affair, with two long papers and appendices, preceded by an editorial entitled 'Setting the record straight'. The publication of these resulted from investigations over several years by Nicholson and IJF-L and, independently, a statistical exercise by J. A. Nelder. This issue of *BB* aroused a great deal of interest, not only among ornithologists, but also in the national press, which gave the subject front-page and even cartoon treatment, partly because of an assumed (but, in fact, non-existent) link with the Piltdown Man fraud. Although, as the authors said, they had waited until most of the main protagonists were dead, and were careful not to attach blame, there were still some people alive who had had at least some involvement, either directly or through relatives, and these made their contrary views known, both then and subsequently, through articles, letters and a book. Despite such counter-argument, the move to relieve British ornithology of the great cloud of suspicion and downright disbelief which had hung over so many records of rare birds for so long can be regarded as a complete success. It must go down as one of the great achievements of *BB* and its then editorial board. Max Nicholson liked to say that it was the exposure of the Hastings Rarities and the formation of the BBRC that put the final nail into the coffin of the old saying that 'What's hit's history, what's missed's mystery'. Since that time, of course, there have been other, smaller-scale exposures of frauds involving specimens, most recently the 'Tadcaster Rarities' (*Brit. Birds* 98: 230–237).

A further development also began in the late 1960s. Papers by J. L. F. Parslow at that time, specially commissioned by *BB*, reviewed status changes in the breeding birds of Britain and Ireland and were subsequently published as a book, *Breeding Birds of Britain and Ireland* (Poyser, 1973). This pattern was later repeated for two other series of ground-breaking papers

that first appeared in *BB* and were republished as books: *Flight Identification of European Raptors* by Richard Porter, Ian Willis, Steen Christensen and Bent Pors Nielsen (Poyser, 1974); and *Gulls: a guide to identification* by Peter Grant (Poyser, 1982).

A number of other books have also been developed from the spawn of publications in *BB*: *Scarce Migrant Birds in Britain and Ireland* by Tim Sharrock (Poyser, 1974); *Frontiers of Bird Identification*, edited by Tim Sharrock (Macmillan Journals, 1980); *Birdwatching in the Seventies* by Ian Wallace (Macmillan, 1981); *A Notebook of Birds*, compiled by Jim Flegg from some of the myriad short notes published over the years (Macmillan, 1981); *Birds New to Britain and Ireland*, edited by Tim Sharrock and published by Poyser in 1982, which republished the first accounts of major rarities (updated in 2005 by Adrian Pitches and Tim Cleeves in their *Birds New to Britain 1908–2004* from the same stable); and a compilation of 34 stories by a cross-section of British ornithologists describing their *Best Days with British Birds* was put together and edited by MAO and Stuart Winter (*BB*, 1989). Now, to celebrate the centenary, it is hoped to reproduce the entire 100 years of *BB* editorial content in electronic format, which, being fully searchable, will be an invaluable resource for British and West Palearctic ornithology.

These publications represent just one way in which *BB* has expanded, and continues to expand, its horizons. While maintaining its traditional high standards, there has been a deliberate move towards a broader appeal, through a change to more modern and flexible layout, many new features and series, and the organisation of a number of competitions. The 'Bird Photograph of the Year' award has had many imitators, but still attracts top photographers who recognise its influence. The 'Bird Illustrator of the Year' award – which ran from 1979 to 2002 – markedly improved the standard of black-and-white line illustration among bird artists, several of the winners of this award going on to make careers in bird art.

In running these and other awards, *BB* has been supported by generous sponsorship from commercial firms. Appropriately, the first firm to offer both financial support and examples of its main product was Famous Grouse Ltd, which, over many years, was happy to help a much smaller concern that also had a Red



**Fig. 11.** August 1978. A one-off in August 1978 broke new ground as *BB*'s first colourful cover, using the design that won a Young Ornithologists' Club competition.

Grouse as its logo. Sponsorship has also been vital in maintaining the Rarities Committee. While the committee members perform their services entirely voluntarily, the secretary's honorarium and his and the members' postage and travel expenses amount to a considerable sum each year and the long-term sponsorship by Carl Zeiss Ltd has been of great importance. Other key sponsorship and support for awards has been received from book publishers – including Pica Press, Poyser (both of which are now in the A&C Black stable), and Harper-Collins – and others.

A major change in the British ornithological scene in the past two decades has been the advent of several completely new bird magazines. *Bird Watching*, published by EMAP, the leading magazine publisher in the country, appeared in 1986, to be followed in 1987 by *Twitching*, renamed *Birding World* in 1988, which is concerned primarily with the occurrence of rare birds. Another, *Birdwatch*, first appeared in 1992 as a bi-monthly, before changing over to monthly two years later. To some extent, these magazines have made life more difficult for *BB*, not least by eating into its





**Fig. 12.** June 1982. A silver cover to mark the 75th anniversary issue.

circulation and by direct competition through the use of ideas and features pioneered by *BB*; but competition has also been beneficial in forcing each of these magazines to play to its strengths, and establish its own particular niche.

In terms of its physical appearance, *BB* has evolved much more dramatically during the past 20 years than for the first 80, most notably in 1999, when the present, larger format was introduced, and printed in colour throughout, allowing far greater flexibility in the use of illustration. The main concern of the present directors and editorial board, however, has been to maintain *BB*'s role as an indispensable bird journal for birdwatchers. The key aims of *BB* are summarised inside the front cover each month, and a number of elements – such as its status as the respected journal of record, and its coverage of a breadth of topics from behaviour and ecology through distribution and movements to identification, taxonomy and conservation – provide both a link with our past and a signpost for the future.

As has been seen, *BB* long ago extended its coverage beyond the shores of Britain and Ireland, and now recognises the boundaries of the West Palearctic as its natural limits, though

with extensions from time to time to cover the Palearctic species occurring in, for example, Thailand, China and Australia. More recently, the title 'Important Bird Areas' was instigated (*Brit. Birds* 99: 280–281) as an occasional series, of which the first two papers have now been published, on Southwest Greenland (June 2006) and the United Arab Emirates (November 2006). We believe these to be both a valuable resource for our readers, and a clear record of the ornithological importance and conservation needs of these areas.

### *Recent developments*

The late 1990s was a period when new competition from other journals was having a detrimental effect and, in October 1997, three of the four remaining directors (RJC, MAO and Robin Prytherch) resigned and passed their shares in *British Birds* Ltd to Tim Sharrock. Shortly thereafter, ownership of the company was assumed by Christopher and Amanda Helm, who transferred the administration to their home near Robertsbridge, in East Sussex. In the meantime, the editorial board, aware of the need to introduce new (and younger) blood, appointed Ian Carter, Martin Collinson and Nigel Redman as additional members in June 1998, while MAO resigned at the end of 1997, at the end of a 26-year stint.

Early in 2000, *British Birds* faced another significant challenge, for the new arrangements had not proved successful and Christopher Helm informed the editorial board that he would be unable to continue the business beyond May or June of that year. An ad hoc committee was formed consisting of RJC, Jeremy Greenwood, Peter Oliver, Robin Prytherch and Bob Scott, and this, having examined the basics of the business, concluded that it could be made viable. There followed a hectic six weeks of fund-raising, and the resulting help and support of many individuals and organisations, including the RSPB, enabled a new company, *BB 2000 Ltd*, to assume ownership of the business. The members of the working group became the first directors of the company, Tim Sharrock retired as editor at the end of 2000 and, with David Christie holding the fort during the intervening period and providing crucial experience and continuity for the new blood, Roger Riddington took over in February 2001. At the same time, ownership of *BB 2000 Ltd* was transferred to the *British Birds*

Charitable Trust, thus ensuring that any profits made by the company would be available to support British ornithology and, consequently, fully in accord with the sentiments of Harry Witherby.

Since then, membership of the editorial board has expanded: Dawn Balmer joined in February 2003; Chris Kehoe (whose responsibility for dealing with rare subspecies on behalf of BBRC replaced a direct link with the committee that had been broken when Rob Hume retired simultaneously in 1997 as chairman of BBRC and as a member of the editorial board) in October 2005; and Steve Votier in January 2006. The combined breadth of ornithological interests of its members is now considerable. There have also been changes in the membership of the board of directors. Peter Oliver and Robin Prytherch retired, though the former remains as a trustee and the latter as a member of the editorial board. John Eyre and Ian Packer were recruited to the board, followed by Richard Porter, Terry Smeeton and, more recently, Adrian Pitches. At the end of 2005, RJC stood down as chairman and as a director, though remaining on the editorial board and as a trustee, and John Eyre took over as chairman.

As for the future, we are immensely encouraged by the volume of material now being submitted to *BB*. This is testament to the hard work put in by our substantial team of enthusiastic workers and supporters. Most importantly, our subscribers, many of whom have witnessed some of the changes to the fortunes of the journal over the years, have continued to support us loyally. Subscribers are the life-blood of *BB* and we hope for, and indeed rely upon, their continued support, while recognising that we have constantly to earn it. With this support, as we move on to the next hundred years we shall know that, at the very least, Harry Witherby's vision for the journal remains intact.

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# British Birds

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and T &amp; A D Poyser

## Bird Illustrator of the Year

Bearded Tits in Britain and Ireland

Northern Mockingbirds in Britain



**Fig. 13.** August 1996. Black-and-white illustrations remained the familiar *BB* cover format for over 20 years, until January 1999 when the journal switched to its present size and adopted colour photographs on the cover.

### Acknowledgments

In the writing of parts of this account, the correspondence files of the late Duncan Wood have been used. References are also made to editorials in *BB*, especially that in the June 1957 issue, entitled 'The First Fifty Years', which comprised a comprehensive account of the founding, development and achievements of *BB* up to that time. MAO wrote a brief history of *BB* which was published in the 1983 edition of *The Birdwatchers' Yearbook*, and some short quotations have been taken from that. David Christie, Peter Oliver and Robin Prytherch made extensive and helpful comments on a draft, and it was David Christie's idea to reproduce a selection of front covers to illustrate their evolution over the past century.







# Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2005

## Part I: non-passerines

*P.A. Fraser, M. J. Rogers and the Rarities Committee*

This is the forty-eighth annual report of the British Birds Rarities Committee. It is also the twenty-eighth and final report which bears the name M. J. Rogers; sadly, Mike died in October 2006, just as this report was being finalised. In 1978, together with new BBRC chairman Peter Grant, Mike reorganised the working practices of BBRC and it is a testament to his organisational skills that not only has it been fundamentally unchanged since then but also that most other national rarities committees have used the model developed by Mike. Mike's death coincides with perhaps the most fundamental change in the Committee's working system since the late 1970s. From 1st January 2007, we ask that counties, bird observatories and as many individual observers as possible submit their records electronically, to help with our shift to an electronic system for circulation and administration. In addition, anyone posting a photograph of a rarity on the BirdGuides website will also be given the opportunity of submitting the photo directly to BBRC as a formal submission. These changes will improve the speed, efficiency and security of our system, they will allow for much easier archiving and retrieval and will also surely be welcomed as a health and safety measure by the postal workers union as it will remove a significant amount of paper from their system!

The death of Mike Rogers and the move to an electronic system of record assessment is not the only major change. This is the last report to include many much-loved rarities such as Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* and Greenish *Phylloscopus trochiloides*, Radde's *Ph. schwarzi* and Dusky Warblers *Ph. fuscatus*. Autumns may feel the poorer and inland-reservoir birders may mourn the passing of White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* from this report, but

west-coast wader watchers will surely search just as assiduously for American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* and White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*. After all, Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Ph. proregulus* has not been a national rarity for 15 years now, but is the thrill of finding one diminished significantly by that?

D. I. M. Wallace has provided detailed comments for each of the 17 species that were removed from the BBRC list at the beginning of 2006. Ian preceded Peter Grant as chairman of BBRC and was the obvious choice to describe the status of these species in an historical context. Although not always agreeing with our results, or even sometimes our methods, Ian has remained a genuine and stalwart supporter of BBRC and a tireless campaigner for continuing change and modernisation. He understands better than most the need for scrupulous and unbiased adjudication if the national record of rarities is to have any meaning. We are delighted that he has contributed to this year's report.

How complete is the report? Unfortunately, owing to Mike's ill health during 2006, a few records were delayed and will not make it into this year's report. For example, readers will notice that the Shropshire Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens* is not in the report; full details were received only in summer 2006 and, as a potential 'first' for Britain, it had little chance of making it through both BBRC and BOURC in time for this report. The frigatebird sp. seen at Flatholm, in the Bristol Channel, has been accepted as such but is not included in this report because, owing to certain similarities between the two records, it may be possible to link the two. Another example of what may appear to be a missing record involves the Durham 'Amur Wagtail' *Motacilla alba leucopsis*;

the assessment of this record will necessarily take some time as we investigate whether other eastern races can show the characters displayed by this bird. Many 'Black Brant' *Branta bernicla nigricans* records are missing and there are none at all from some of the counties in which they have become more regular, even though we did announce that we would consider such records for the whole of winter 2004/05. It seems likely that those counties have unilaterally brought forward to 1st January 2005 the change of Black Brant status from rarity to scarce migrant. Having struggled with making sense of numbers of birds that pay no heed to county boundaries in their pursuit of grazing, BBRC can understand this, but we present an admittedly incomplete set of records for the second half of that winter period.

What sort of year are we reporting? Rufous-tailed Robin *Luscinia sibilans* features as a new bird for Britain and, in addition, we have the second records of Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica* and Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii*, the third of Belted Kingfisher *Ceryle alcyon*, the third of Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens* of recent times, the fifth of Green-backed Heron *Butorides virescens*, and the first Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus* since 1989. There was also a memorable arrival of Trumpeter Finches *Bucanetes githagineus*, which increased the British total by 50%. However, 2005 will probably be best remembered for the ornithological fallout from Hurricane Wilma, which during the first few days of November sped up the eastern seaboard of North America and then swung out into the Atlantic, feeding into a jet stream that poured unprecedented numbers of Nearctic vagrants of various species into Britain. Over 50 Laughing Gulls *L. atricilla*, several Franklin's Gulls *L. pipixcan* and Chimney Swifts *Chaetura pelagica*, together with unseasonal Solitary *Tringa solitaria* and Upland Sandpipers *Bartramia longicauda* were all associated with this weather system, as perhaps was a Grey-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus* in Hertfordshire. In their final year of being official rarities, two other species put in stellar appearances: Greenish Warbler showed why it was being demoted to scarce migrant status with over 35 reported, the majority around the second weekend of September, while birders at Rutland Water, Leicestershire, had three juvenile White-winged Black Terns together during the same period.

Readers may be interested in further developments with two older records that do not appear in this report. Though the record was published in last year's report as 'not accepted', BBRC struggled with the assessment of a bird identified as a 'Wilson's Snipe' *Gallinago gallinago delicata* on St Mary's, Scilly, in October 1998. Having reached the conclusion that it was on the wrong side of marginal for conclusive identification as *delicata*, we were just about to go to print with a paper explaining our reasons for not accepting the record when correspondence with Killian Mullarney and Ian Lewington presented an alternative analysis of some of the more critical identification features, in particular the shape and pattern of the outermost tail feather. We always felt that to come to a decision was better than the record being pending in the long-term, and we felt that we were leaving the door open for further evidence. Now that we have this, the record will be recirculated. We have also yet to reach a conclusion on whether we need to re-evaluate the Druridge Bay Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*, also from 1998. We have now reviewed all available material on the 'Minsmere curlew' as detailed in last year's introduction (*Brit. Birds* 98: 630) and have assessed it against the criteria used for the Druridge Bay bird; a draft document is circulating among BBRC members at the time of writing, and we hope to report progress on this (and indeed the Scilly snipe) shortly.

#### Acknowledgments

We wish to thank all the observers and photographers who sent in details of rarities to BBRC. Once again, we give a significant vote of thanks to the network of county and regional recorders, and their records committees, who see and comment on many of the descriptions that we receive. Their work is often unacknowledged but is invaluable for BBRC as they give the local perspective which BBRC simply cannot provide. We thank the editors of *Birding Scotland*, *Birding World*, *Birdwatch* and *Yorkshire Birding* for help with the compilation and documentation of some records, and we are indebted to BirdGuides, particularly Russell Slack for his wholehearted contribution to the work of BBRC and in assisting with the development work of rare-bird recording. We would also like to thank Dick Forsman, Martin Garner, Ian Lewington and Killian Mullarney for their input on difficult records this year. Last but by no means least, we are once again enormously grateful to Carl Zeiss Ltd for sponsorship of the Committee's work, and thank them for supporting us for the past 25 years.

Colin Bradshaw



### Species removed from the list in January 2006

The 17 departing species are made up of nine non-passerines and eight passerines: Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*, Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*, Great White Egret *Ardea alba*, Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, Red-footed Falcon, American Golden Plover, White-rumped Sandpiper, White-winged Black Tern, Alpine Swift *Apus melba*, Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*, Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*, Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*, Greenish Warbler, Radde's Warbler, Dusky Warbler, Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni*, Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*. Their order of historical abundance varies greatly; the commonest is White-winged Black Tern, with 861 individuals up to and including 2005, the rarest is Radde's Warbler with 271. Because most lack any real affinity as vagrants, no attempt has been made to address them as a group. However, regular readers of BBRC annual reports can find past description of and debate on their status, not only in earlier text comments but also in various books published in the last 30 years which have attempted to take British rare birds as a cohesive subject.

Although the rarity records in *The Handbook* (Witherby *et al.* 1938–41) have since been much revised (particularly by the expunging of the 'Hastings Rarities' in 1962), the species and subspecies accounts remain the foundation of rare-bird disciplines and the latter contain what are otherwise still rare plumage descriptions of races. The BOU's status review (*The Status of Birds in Britain and Ireland*, 1971) could not accommodate full record details but it did an excellent job of revising historical occurrence patterns, providing also the last full review of subspecies. Sharrock & Sharrock (*Rare Birds in Britain and Ireland*, 1976) broke new ground in repeating the senior author's prior attachment of monthly histograms and county-exhibiting maps of Britain & Ireland to rarity analysis. It also remains the only text to have addressed in any statistical measure the artefacts of observer numbers, hence hunting effort and range, and the true trends behind the resultant finds of Nearctic and Palearctic rarities. Dymond *et al.* (*Rare Birds in Britain and Ireland*, 1989) applied the same combination of histogram and map disciplines to rarities over the (then) entire BBRC period from 1958 to 1985 but made little further attempt to make their trend comments

free of human vagaries.

Despite so much topical reporting in recent decades, no third digest of rarity occurrence patterns has appeared, but both Evans (*Rare Birds in Britain, 1800–1990*, 1991) and Naylor (*A Reference Manual of Rare Birds in Great Britain and Ireland*, 1996, 1998) made heroic efforts to complete catalogues of all rarities (respectively, from 1800 to 1990 and from earliest recorded date to 1996). Naylor's Reference Manuals have since been adopted by BBRC as the national database of record details (and no serious student of vagrancy should be without them). For a highly imaginative account of some of the vectors that bring rarities to Britain & Ireland, Vinicombe's introductory text in *Rare Birds in Britain and Ireland: a photographic record* (Vinicombe & Cottridge, 1996) remains unique. Not every mystery is explained but the arguments for 'reversed migration' are well made and illustrated. Palmer's *First for Britain and Ireland* (2000) provided an engaging history and this is also the first book to respect the recent complete divide between British and Irish record-keeping. Finally, the BTO's mammoth *Migration Atlas* (2002) has provided the long-awaited addition of ringing recovery analysis to the description of bird migration in its broad sense. The *Migration Atlas* and Burton's *Birds and Climate Change* (1995) together form the essential backdrop to the rarity scene.

Access to the now enormous literature on rarities throughout Europe and the West Palearctic is difficult for amateur students, but in addition to the topical reports in journals (and on the internet), four accounts offer collated information. The first two are in BWP and particularly *BWP Concise* (1998), in which every effort was made to update accidental records, to remap breeding ranges and to reassess breeding populations by country. The others are in Alström *et al.*'s range and status notes in their *A Field Guide to the Rare Birds of Britain and Europe* (1991) and in Mitchell's notes on European status in the *Photographic Handbook of the Rare Birds of Britain and Europe* (1999). The last two help most towards a quick understanding of where else 'British' rarities occur.

In spite of all the above efforts, the whole system of finding, reporting and judging of rarities falls some way short of tested science. It would be good to see the Association of European Rarities Committees consider two issues

for a start. The first is the calculation of national indices (or clear histories) of observer numbers, succeeding hunting strategies and changing geographical cover. (In Britain, these have included collection for not just certain identity but gain in the specimen marketplace, trapping for the same motives and also for sale as food or to cages, disciplined monitoring and trapping at the mainly post-war bird observatories, patch-working at reservoirs, old sewage-farms and elsewhere and the increasingly frenetic twitching of the last three decades.) The

second is the isochronal, latitudinal and longitudinal examination of rarity occurrence patterns across all European nations. Assemble just one full database for any rare bird and its true vector might well pop out. As for Britain & Ireland, it would be good to see periodic reunions of the now separated registers. The birds themselves do not recognise any kind of human boundary.

*D. I. M. Wallace*

### Systematic list of accepted records

The principles and procedures followed in considering records were explained in the 1958 report (*Brit. Birds* 53: 155–158). The systematic list is set out in the same way as the 2004 report (98: 628–694). The following points show the basis on which the list has been compiled:

1. The details included for each record are (1) county; (2) locality; (3) number of birds if more than one, and age and sex if known (in the case of spring and summer records, however, the age is normally given only where the bird concerned was not in adult plumage); (4) if photographed or sound-recorded (and this evidence assessed by the Committee); (5) if trapped or found dead and where specimen is stored, if known; (6) date(s); and (7) observer(s), in alphabetical order.
2. In general, this report is confined to records which are regarded as certain, and 'probables' are not included. In cases of the very similar Eastern *Phylloscopus orientalis* and Western Bonelli's Warblers *Ph. bonelli*, however, we publish indeterminate records, and this also applies to those of frigatebirds *Fregata*, the 'soft-plumaged petrel' *Pterodroma mollis/feae/madeira* complex and Booted *Hippobolus caligata* and Sykes's Warblers *H. rama* (see also *Brit. Birds* 94: 395).
3. The sequence of species, English names and scientific nomenclature follow the 'British Birds' List of Birds of the Western Palearctic, see [www.britishbirds.co.uk/bblist.htm](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk/bblist.htm)
4. The three numbers in parentheses after each species name refer specifically to the total number of individuals recorded in Britain (i) to the end of 1949, (ii) for the period since 1950, but excluding (iii) those listed here for the current year. The decision as to how many individuals were involved is often difficult, but a consensus view is represented by 'possibly the same' (counted as different in the totals), 'probably the same' (counted as the same in the totals), or 'the same' when evidence is certain or overwhelming. An identical approach is applied to records of a particular species recurring at the same, or a nearby, locality after a lapse of time. In considering claims of more than one individual at the same or adjacent localities, the Committee requires firm evidence before more than one is accepted.
5. The breeding and wintering ranges are given in parentheses for each species.

### Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* (9, 122, 0)

There were no records accepted of wild birds this year. The identification of a bird at Blithfield Reservoir, Staffordshire from 30th September to 1st October was accepted, though the Committee agreed that this was unlikely to be a genuinely wild bird given the date, associated species and location.

(Rare and declining throughout entire breeding range from N Scandinavia to NE Siberia. Reintroduction scheme in Swedish Lapland boosts numbers wintering in The Netherlands. Migratory, wintering in scattered groups in Netherlands, Hungary, S Black and Caspian Sea areas, N Kazakhstan and Yangtse valley, China.)



**Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*****North American and E Siberian race *B. b. nigricans*, 'Black Brant' (0, 171, 7)**

Essex Inner Blackwater Estuary, adult, 2nd January to 19th March (J. Buchanan, R. Neave) (*Brit. Birds* 98: 632); Foulness/Wakering area, adult, 2nd January to 6th March (S. Arlow) (*Brit. Birds* 98: 631); Old Hall Marshes, two adults, 6th January, one to 16th February (per RSPB) (*Brit. Birds* 98: 632); Kirby Backwaters, adult, 25th January (E. Huxley *et al.*); same as The Naze (*Brit. Birds* 98: 632); River Crouch/River Roach area, adult, 11th February to 6th March (S. Arlow, A. Shearring, D. Wood).

Hampshire Portsmouth, Langstone and Chichester harbours complex, at least three adults remaining from 2004 (*Brit. Birds* 98: 632): one, mainly Gosport area, from 29th December 2004 to at least 14th February (T. F. Carpenter *et al.*); one, Northney on 2nd January (S. J. Wright) and then off Broad-marsh, Langstone Harbour, on 16th January (J. Crook); and one Black Point, 2nd February to 17th March (J. Crook, A. Johnson), presumably having spent January at West Wittering (West Sussex).

Kent Chetney Marsh, Medway Estuary, 2nd January (D. Tutt). Harty, Sheppey, 13th February to 13th March (J. E. Tilbrook, B. E. Wright *et al.*); another, 13th February (J. E. Tilbrook, B. E. Wright *et al.*).

Norfolk Cley, two, 27th January (P. Morrison). Various localities along north Norfolk coast, total of five, January (per G. E. Dunmore), including adult with two hybrid young at Holkham Great Marsh; presumed same as north Norfolk 2003 and earlier (*Brit. Birds* 98: 632) (*Brit. Birds* 99: plate 40).

Suffolk Erwardon, Shotley, 10th–31st March (A. M. Gregory, L. G. Woods *et al.*).

Sussex, West See Hampshire, above.

2004 Dorset Stanpit Marsh, 5th January (*Brit. Birds* 98: 631); observers included T. J. Butler.

2004 Suffolk Levington, River Orwell, 9th–28th February and 13th March (per D. F. Walsh) (*Brit. Birds* 98: 632).

(Expanding W in Arctic NE Siberia to Lena delta, where overlaps with nominate race. Majority breed in Arctic Alaska and E to Victoria Island, Canada. Migratory, wintering on Pacific coast of North America, S to Baja California. Formerly, large numbers wintered in N China, Korean Peninsula and Japan, but now rare.)

**Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis* (10, 61, 1)**

Kent Chetney Marsh, Medway Estuary, 9th November, photo (D. Tutt).

2003 Dorset Shell Bay, Poole Harbour, first-winter, 12th November (C. Cottrell).

(Breeds Taimyr Peninsula, Siberia. Migrates SW to winter in coastal regions of W Black Sea in Romania and Bulgaria. Small numbers regularly winter in Netherlands, Greece, Turkey. Some may still use former wintering areas along Caspian Sea.)

**Black Duck *Anas rubripes* (0, 30, 0)**

Scilly Tresco, ♀, 26th November 2004 to 18th May, photo (*Brit. Birds* 98: 634).

(Breeds E North America from Labrador S to North Carolina and W to Manitoba. Most are resident or dispersive but N breeders migrate to winter in coastal SE USA.)

**Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors* (10, 218, 3)**

Anglesey Malltraeth, ♀, 17th–24th April (K. G. Croft, S. Culley, M. Hughes).

Norfolk Burnham Norton, ♂, 8th May, photo (M. A. Golley *et al.*). Cley, ♀/first-winter, 5th–9th and 14th November (P. M. Wilson *et al.*).

(Breeds from S Alaska, across much of temperate Canada to SC USA. Migratory, wintering in S USA, Mexico, Caribbean and N South America.)

**Redhead *Aythya americana* (0, 3, 0)**

2004 Outer Hebrides Loch an Duin, Barra, ♀, 7th–8th November (A. W. Lauder, K. D. Shaw), presumed same as Outer Hebrides 2003/04 (*Brit. Birds* 97: 563).

(Breeds from C Alaska to S California and E to prairie provinces of W Canada and USA. Local breeder in NE USA but range expanding along NE seaboard. Winters in warmer regions of S USA, Mexico and Cuba.)

**Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* (c. 160, 302, 7)**

Bedfordshire Elstow, adult ♀, 12th November to at least 15th February 2006, photo (per

[www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)), presumed returning bird (*Brit. Birds* 98: 634).

Cambridgeshire Kingfisher's Bridge, ♀, 30th April (J. Oates *et al.*). Fen Drayton Gravel-pit, ♂, 16th July to 16th August, 27th August, photo (R. M. Patient *et al.*).

Derbyshire Carsington Water, ♂, 2nd January (J. Bradley *et al.*).

Dorset Radipole Lake, first-winter ♀, 10th–20th November, photo (D. J. Chown *et al.*).

Essex Chigborough Gravel-pit, first-winter ♂, 15th–16th February (R. Neave), same as Heybridge Gravel-pits, 2004 (*Brit. Birds* 98: 634). Abberton Reservoir, adult ♂, 23rd February to 23rd March, photo (N. J. Ransdale *et al.*).

Forth Gart Gravel-pits, Forth, ♂, 24th–25th September, photo (L. Leisk *et al.*).

Staffordshire Brookleys Lake, ♂, 9th–17th January (A. Lawrence, G. Pepper, S. J. Turner *et al.*); same Blithfield Reservoir, 18th, 23rd January, 20th–29th November (P. D. Hyde, G. Pepper, S. J. Turner *et al.*); same, Belvide Reservoir, intermittently 9th–25th December (S. Nuttall); same, Gailey Reservoir, 10th–11th, 27th–28th December (per N. Pomiankowski); same, Chasewater Reservoir, 16th–18th, 26th December, photo (G. Evans, per N. Pomiankowski).

Suffolk Alton Water, ♀, 1st January (S. Abbott, D. F. Walsh *et al.*), presumed same as Bawdsey, 2004 (*Brit. Birds* 98: 634); same, Trimley Marsh, 4th–5th January (N. Odin, J. Zantboer *et al.*).

2003 Worcestershire Westwood Great Pool, Droitwich, ♂, 14th October (T. M. Hinett *et al.*).

2004 Staffordshire Brookleys Lake, ♂, 29th December, photo (A. Lawrence, G. Pepper, S. J. Turner *et al.*).

First described by G黦ldenst鋎t in 1770 from southern Russia, this fine, coppery duck entered British ornithology in 1771 when Pennant noted an undated specimen of a drake killed in Lincolnshire. This and other early records have been ignored or questioned but, in 1939, *The Handbook* listed c. 145 birds, of which over 103 had occurred in southeast England. By 1970, the grand total had passed 200 (BOU 1971) and records were averaging about five a year. Earlier, however, in 1968, the bird had been shunned by BBRC owing to a reported high incidence of escapes (and confusing hybrids). Consequently, in national terms, it lost face and attention and, even from the reinvestigation of its status by Vinicombe (2000), no measure of its occurrences (in any guise) is available from 1969 to 1985.

Because it remains a rarity in Scotland, Wales and Cornwall, and the English picture is fragmented, the view of ornithologists in its British stronghold of Norfolk is important. In that county, Ferruginous Ducks have occurred since 1805, with 20 shot or caught in decoys up to 1890 and a further 45 noted up to 1929. The latter series included a sudden influx of 20 to two broads in mid April 1903. Between 1930 and 1998, another 32 were found. Few of these birds are considered to have been escapes and the occurrence pattern over the last two centuries indicates that most birds have been wintering on Norfolk's fresh waters from November to April. Intriguingly, Taylor *et al.* (1999) mentioned what may have been breeding attempts at three wetlands in 1992, 1993 and 1995.

In his broader review, Vinicombe used records from two periods, 1958–68 and 1986–97, covering 23 years, to demonstrate that the annual average between the two periods had more than doubled, from six to 13 birds a year, that there had been marked influxes of up to 28 birds in 1960, 1986 and 1987, and that monthly totals of new arrivals rose steadily from July to a November peak of 37 birds and then fell to a virtual absence in May.

Vinicombe also identified Common Pochard *A. ferina* as a possible 'carrier species' from eastern Europe. This is an intriguing thought. Few Ferruginous Ducks winter above 46°N; unlike its congeners, the species does not normally form close flocks and the normal limits of their winter movements are not well known, although some dispersal west of south occurs across the Sahara. The few European recoveries also indicate movements within a southwest quadrant; none show a direct westward orientation. Most British birds may indeed be fellow travellers caught up in communities of more abundant relatives aiming at the ice-free wetlands of peripheral Europe.

Within the last eight years, 1999 delivered another surge of 23 birds but since 2000, the annual average has decreased to 13. In most of Europe, the Ferruginous Duck has been in retreat for over 25 years. As there may be as few as 30 pairs in Germany, France and Spain, Vinicombe looked east to Poland as 'perhaps a likely source of some of our vagrants'. However, he missed another possible source in Sicily and Italy (Corso & Janni 2001), where at least 60 pairs breed, over 250 have been counted in recent winters and up to 1,500 may occur together in migrant concentrations.

Once again, for the latest discussion of its field characters and those aped by hybrids (Gillham *et al.*



(1966) examined 20 Ferruginous Duck records reported between 1947 and 1951 and found that 15% were actually hybrids), Vinicombe supplies it. Having so recently argued for proper attention to be given to this species, he will be disappointed that for a second time BBRC has dropped it. The recent rejection rate (2000–04) has been 6%.

Corso, A., & Janni, O. 2001. Status of Ferruginous Duck in Italy. *Brit. Birds* 94: 149–150.

Gillham, E., Harrison, J. M., & Harrison, J. G. 1966. A study of certain *Aythya* hybrids. *The Wildfowl Trust Seventeenth Annual Report* 1964–65: 49–65.

Taylor, M., Seago, M., Allard, P., Dorling, D. 1999. *The Birds of Norfolk*. Pica Press, Mountfield.

Vinicombe, K. E. 2000. Identification of Ferruginous Duck and its status in Britain and Ireland. *Brit. Birds* 93: 4–21.

(Main breeding range in temperate steppe-forest from Poland and Hungary E through Ukraine to Caspian Sea, but distribution often patchy. Other populations occur in S Spain, Kazakhstan, W Mongolia and Tibetan Plateau. Migratory, most winter in E Mediterranean, Black and Caspian Seas, NE Africa and Indian subcontinent.)

## Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis* (0, 75, 11)

Cornwall Drift Reservoir, first-winter ♂, 8th November to at least 21st February 2006, photo (per [www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)) (*Brit. Birds* 99: plate 41).

Devon Beesands Ley, ♀, 4th–5th March (K. Rylands, P. Saunders *et al.*).

Greater Manchester Heaton Park, ♂, 21st–28th August (P. Berry, I. M. McKerchar).

Kent Bough Beech Reservoir, ♂, 16th March, photo (M. Wheeler *et al.*, per B. E. Wright), see also Kent/East Sussex 2004 (*Brit. Birds* 98: 635) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 140).

Lancashire & North Merseyside Myerscough Quarry, Fylde, ♂, 6th October to 10th November, photo (C. G. Batty *et al.*).

Leicestershire Rutland Water, ♀, 28th April to 11th May (J. A. Forryan, J. Wright *et al.*) (fig. 1).

Perth and Kinross Blair Drummond, ♂, 23rd March to 4th April (N. Bielby *et al.*). Vane Farm, ♂, 3rd–4th July, photo (A. W. Lauder, J. S. Nadin, K. D. Shaw *et al.*).

Shropshire Monkmoor Pool, ♂, 6th–25th June (G. Holmes *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 224).

Warwickshire Farnborough, first- or second-winter ♀, 27th February to 20th March, photo (J. J. Bowley *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 116).

Yorkshire, East Hornsea Mere, ♂, 13th November to 16th January 2006, photo (T. Isherwood, A. F. Johnson *et al.*).

Yorkshire, North Stapleton Gravel-pits, Bolton-on-Swale, ♂, 21st July, photo (S. C. Bell *et al.*); same, Cleasby Gravel-pit, 22nd–23rd July, photo.

2003 Dumfries & Galloway Castle Loch, Lochmaben, ♂, 29th December to 28th January 2004 (*Brit.*

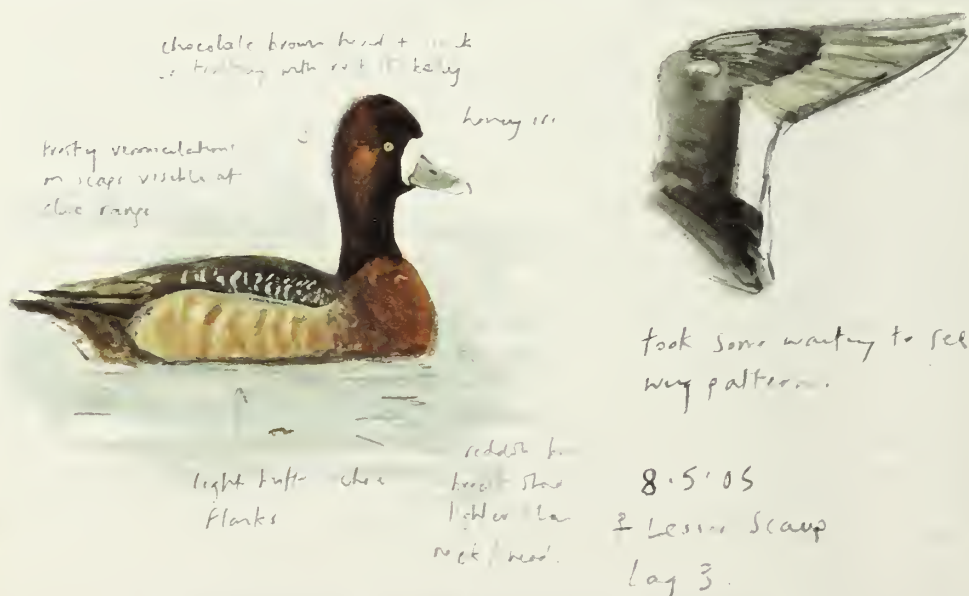


Fig. 1. Female Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*, Rutland Water, Leicestershire, May 2005.

*Birds* 97: 566); correct observers were B. Orr, A. W. Reid *et al.*

**2004 Kent/East Sussex** Scotney Gravel-pit, ♂, 17th November to at least 14th March 2005, photo (*Brit. Birds* 98: 635).

**2004 Suffolk** Suffolk Water Park, Bramford, first-winter ♂, 16th March, photo (R. Marsh, L. Woods, J. Zantboer *et al.*), note correct site name (*Brit. Birds* 98: 635).

**2004 Sussex, East** See Kent/East Sussex above.

(Breeds from C Alaska through Canada to Hudson Bay, and S to Washington and South Dakota. Isolated populations E of Great Lakes. Winters along both coastlines of USA, in E from New Jersey to Mexico, W Indies, and C America to N Colombia.)

## King Eider *Somateria spectabilis* (71, 120, 5)

**Ayrshire** Barassie and Troon, ♂, 26th April to 16th June (per A. Hogg), same as Ayrshire 2004 (*Brit. Birds* 98: 637).

**Northeast Scotland** Blackdog, first-summer ♂, 17th April to 9th May (N. A. Littlewood *et al.*); second-summer ♂, 29th May to 9th June (N. A. Littlewood *et al.*).

**Shetland** West Linga Sound and Symbister, Whalsay, ♂, 17th January to 2nd March (B. Marshall *et al.*), presumed same as one of two, Cat Firth, Mainland, 2003 (*Brit. Birds* 98: 637). Bluemull Sound, Unst, ♀, 27th January to 28th March (M. A. Maher, B. H. Thomason *et al.*), presumed returning bird (*Brit. Birds* 98: 637); ♂, 6th March to 10th April (P. V. Harvey, M. Heubeck *et al.*), presumed returning bird (*Brit. Birds* 98: 637); first-winter ♂, 7th–15th December, photo (B. H. & T. Thomason *et al.*). Mousa Sound, Mainland, second-winter ♂, 5th April (A. H. J. Harrop); again, 17th November to 2006 (P. M. Ellis *et al.*), possibly same as one of two first seen Cat Firth, Mainland, 2003 (*Brit. Birds* 98: 637). Collafirth and Dales Voe, Mainland, second-summer ♂, intermittently 31st May to at least 15th July (M. S. Chapman *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 225), possibly same as Mousa Sound, presumed same as one of two first seen Cat Firth. Clift Sound, Burra/Trondra/Mainland, ♂, 23rd July to at least 27th September (R. A. Haywood *et al.*); another ♂ from 12th August (M. Heubeck, R. M. Mellor *et al.*), one until at least 1st October; one probably same as individual first seen Weisdale Voe December 2003 (*Brit. Birds* 98: 637).

**2004 Norfolk** Titchwell, first-winter ♂, 11th December to 3rd January 2005 (per G. E. Dunmore) (*Brit. Birds* 98: 637).

**2004 Outer Hebrides** Sound of Harris, first-summer ♂, 26th March (N. Smith).

(Breeds from Kanin Peninsula E across Arctic Siberia, including Novaya Zemlya and W Svalbard, Arctic Alaska, N Canada and N Greenland. European population winters along ice-free coasts of White Sea, N Norway and Iceland. Pacific population winters in Bering Sea.)

## Black Scoter *Melanitta americana* (0, 6, 1)

**Caernarvonshire** Llanfairfechan, adult ♂, 13th January to 30th April (per [www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)), presumed returning bird (*Brit. Birds* 98: 638); same, 3rd October to 29th December.

**Moray & Nairn** Burghead Bay, ♂, 10th October (R. Proctor).

(Breeds on Siberian tundra from Yana River E to Alaska, and N Canada to Newfoundland. In N Atlantic, winters along coasts of E USA, N to South Carolina, and inland on Great Lakes. Elsewhere, winters in ice-free seas along both coasts of N Pacific Ocean, S to N Japan and California.)

## Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola* (2, 10, 0)

**2004 Staffordshire** Croxall, Drayton Bassett & Whitemoor Hay Gravel-pits, ♂, intermittently from 24th May to 9th June; correct observers were M. Yapp *et al.* (*Brit. Birds* 98: 638).

Rumours that this bird bore a metal ring were without foundation and based on a single low-resolution photograph showing something glinting in the sun on its leg. This was presumably a bead of water, as the bird was seen well on land and was clearly unringed. Though the presence of a metal ring would not necessarily mean that the bird was of captive origin, it would be suspicious, since the proportion of captive Buffleheads with rings must be far greater than the proportion of wild ringed birds. In this respect, however, the Staffordshire bird can be given a clean bill of health.

(Forested regions of North America from C Alaska throughout W and C Canada to Hudson Bay, and S to Montana and NE California. Winters throughout North America from Aleutian Islands and coastal Alaska, S along both seaboard of USA to N Mexico, with small numbers inland.)



## Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica* (0, 1, 1)

Northeast Scotland Ythan Estuary, ♂, 13th–22nd May, photo (P. Shepherd *et al.* per *Birding Scotland*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plates 177 & 178; plate 1); same, Loch of Strathbeg, 23rd May to 23rd June (per *Birding Scotland*).

This is the first Barrow's Goldeneye to be treated as a genuine vagrant since the male at Irvine (Ayrshire) from 4th November to 28th December 1979. The credentials of British sightings as wild birds have always been viewed sceptically, owing to the combination of a small but significant risk of escapes and the unlikely location and timing of some previous records. This bird, however, was wary, unringed and in northern Scotland, and surely deserves the benefit of the doubt. The first for Ireland, a male at Quoile Pondage, Co. Down, from 20th November 2005 to April 2006, followed hot on the heels of this bird and perhaps lends it further credibility.

(Resident W Palearctic population breeds Iceland, and two N American populations. Larger Nearctic population breeds S Alaska and W Canada, S to N California, and winters on adjacent coastal lowlands; smaller E Canadian population breeds Labrador and winters along coast S to New York.)

1. Male Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica* (below), with Common Goldeneye *B. clangula*, Ythan Estuary, Northeast Scotland, May 2005.

## White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii* (5, 262, 22)

Argyll Inverneill, 5th February, photo (J. M. Dickson).

Highland Aultgrishan, adult, 13th April (K. D. Shaw). Melvaig, adult, 23rd April (S. D. Housden, K. D. Shaw).

Kent Dungeness, adult, 28th April (S. Davies).

Orkney Holm Sound, second-summer, 18th July to 10th August, photo (per [www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)).

Outer Hebrides Skigersta, Lewis, adult, 3rd April (M. J. McKee *et al.*); five, adults, 24th April to 2nd May (A. Robinson, M. S. Scott, K. D. Shaw *et al.*). North Tolsta, Lewis, second-summer, 19th April (M. S. Scott, K. D. Shaw). Cellar Head, Lewis, adult, 20th April (M. S. Scott, K. D. Shaw). Tiumpan Head, Lewis, three, age uncertain, second-summer and adult, 20th April (M. S. Scott, K. D. Shaw); adult, 22nd May (A. Robinson, M. S. Scott). Mangersta, Lewis, adult, 5th May (T. ap Rheinallt, M. S. Scott); two, adults, 7th May (T. ap Rheinallt, A. Robinson).

Shetland Collafirth, Mainland, 20th to at least 24th February, photo (P. Dugard *et al.*); same, Ronas Voe, Mainland, 16th March (per P. V. Harvey). Eshaness, Mainland, immature, 8th May (H. R. Harrop, P. V. Harvey, M. Mellor). Kirkabister, Nesting, Mainland, 25th October to 2006 (W. F. & W. R. H. Peplow *et al.*), presumed same as 2004 and earlier years (*Brit. Birds* 98: 639).

2002 Outer Hebrides Traigh Nisabost, Harris, adult, 1st November (I. H. Leach *et al.*).

2003 Outer Hebrides Sound of Harris, second-year, 15th May (P. R. Boyer).

2004 Highland Mellon Udrigle, adult, 20th February (S. Bradley, S. Cohen).

2004 Orkney North Ronaldsay, adult, 1st June (R. Simpson *et al.*).

(In W Palearctic, rare and sporadic breeder along Arctic coasts of European Russia, E from Yamal Peninsula and Novaya Zemlya. Also breeds in coastal regions of Siberia, N Alaska and Canada E to Mackenzie River and Baffin Island. Winters at sea, in E Atlantic, S to S Norway, but distribution poorly known.)

## Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris* (2, 20, 2)

Anglesey South Stack, adult, 12th February (K. G. Croft).

Outer Hebrides Sula Sgeir, adult, 25th–31st August, photo (D. Macfarlane, per M. S. Scott) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plates 392 & 393).

2004 Norfolk Sheringham, 10th October (M. D. Crewe, M. P. Lee, M. J. Saunt).

Discovered by the 'guga' hunters of Lewis on their annual expedition to harvest Gannet *Morus basanus* chicks from this uninhabited island, the Sula Sgeir albatross represents the third instance of a lone bird spending successive breeding seasons within a British gannetry (this bird returned in 2006). Albatrosses may live 50 years or longer and it is conceivable that this is the same individual that summered at Bass Rock, Lothian, in 1968 and 1969 and Hermaness, Shetland, in most years between 1972 and 1995. Also in the Outer Hebrides, one was seen near the huge gannetry on St Kilda in June 2002 (*Brit. Birds* 96: 545) and it is interesting to speculate whether there is more than one Black-browed Albatross frequenting our remotest islands.

This species has been seen in Britain & Ireland in every month of the year, although the monthly pattern of sightings (fig. 2) is somewhat skewed by the gannetry resident(s) returning in early spring. The handful of midwinter records suggests that such birds may also occasionally remain in British and Irish waters throughout the year. However, leaving the gannetry bird(s) aside, it is apparent that the best chance of seeing an albatross in Britain is during an early spring or autumn seawatch, although the records are well spread among the popular headlands. Of seven in Britain identified as immatures, four have been in August with no more than one in any other month.

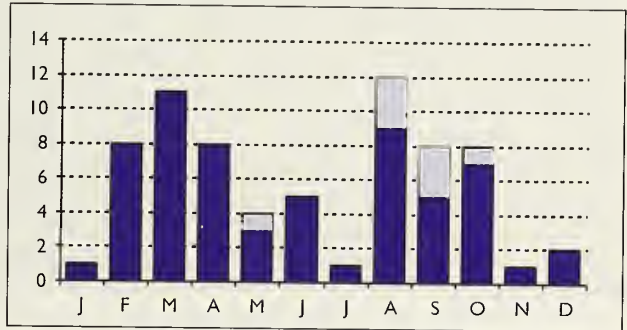


Fig. 2. Black-browed Albatrosses *Thalassarche melanophris* in British and Irish waters, by month (British records in dark blue, Irish records in pale blue). Birds resident in ganneries are counted separately each year. The 2005 Sula Sgeir bird is omitted as its true arrival date is not known.

(Breeds on islands in S South Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Outside the breeding season, disperses N throughout southern oceans as far as Tropic of Capricorn.)

## Zino's/Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma madeira/feae* (0, 33, 0)

2003 Yorkshire, East Flamborough Head, 24th August (P. A. Lassey, I. Marshall, J. Wasse) (*Brit. Birds* 97: 568), previously published as 24th October in error.

(Zino's Petrel confined to central mountains of Madeira where entire world population is c. 65–80 pairs; non-breeding range unknown. Fea's Petrel breeds in Madeira archipelago (Bugio) and Cape Verde Islands. Outside breeding season disperses throughout N Atlantic.)

## North Atlantic Little Shearwater *Puffinus baroli* (3, 58, 1)

Cornwall Porthgwarra, 28th April (M. T. Elliot, D. A. & J. S. Bridges).

(N Atlantic range restricted to warmer waters of Madeira, Canary Islands, Cape Verde Islands and possibly Azores. Outside the breeding season found at sea near breeding sites within N Atlantic.)

## Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* (1, 396, 29)

At sea Sea area Sole. 18 km SW of Scilly, four, 14th June, one photographed (E. A. Fisher, R. L. Flood, J. K. Higginson *et al.*); 22nd June (E. A. Fisher, R. L. Flood *et al.*). 10 km S of Scilly, two, 18th June, photo (E. A. Fisher, R. L. Flood, B. Lascelles *et al.*); two, 5th July, one photographed (E. A. Fisher, R. L. Flood *et al.*); two, 10th July (E. A. Fisher, R. L. Flood *et al.*); 14th July, photo (E. A. Fisher, R. L. Flood *et al.*); two, 5th August, one photographed (E. A. Fisher, R. L. Flood *et al.*); 15th August, photo (E. A. Fisher, R. L. Flood *et al.*). 10 km N of Scilly, two, 8th July, one photographed (R. L. Flood *et al.*) (*Brit.*



*Birds* 98: plate 310). 11 km S St Mary's, Scilly, 11th July, photo (R. & S. Adderley, R. L. Flood *et al.*); 2nd August (E. A. Fisher, R. L. Flood *et al.*); two, 10th August (E. A. Fisher, R. L. Flood, F. J. Maroevic *et al.*). 14 km SE of St Mary's, Scilly, 13th August, photo (E. A. Fisher *et al.*); 23rd August, photo (B. Lascelles *et al.*). 18 km S of Scilly, four, 2nd July, three photographed (E. A. Fisher, R. L. Flood *et al.*); 25th July, photo (E. A. Fisher, R. L. Flood *et al.*). 7 km SE of Scilly, 27th August (R. L. Flood *et al.*).

1998 At sea Sea area Sole. 10 km S of Scilly, 28th August (R. L. Flood).

First described by Kuhl in 1820 from the 'Southern oceans', Wilson's is one of the two commonest storm-petrels of the world. In May 1838, en voyage to Australia, John Gould reported many immediately off Land's End (Cornwall). Harry Witherby was not persuaded that the species could reach the northeast Atlantic in that month but, when drafting his text, had the senior editor of *The Handbook* read Brian Roberts's (1940) monograph on the bird? And seen his month-by-month map of the bird's dispersal in the Atlantic? As interpreted by Fisher & Lockley (1954), this showed that Wilson's Storm-petrels 'spread... in May... eastwards... [from] the western half of the North Atlantic across... towards Portugal and the Bay of Biscay, off which there is quite a concentration in June. By July there is a band of [birds] across the whole North Atlantic with its northern border at about 40°N but not reaching Britain. In August, the eastern [birds] disappear... [but] in September, they reappear again off Portugal and the homeward stream... runs south... in October... elements... cannot be within much more than a few hundred miles of Cornwall in June and July. Most of the British records [then numbering about ten] are between October and December – suggesting young non-breeding birds, inexperienced in the ways of wind and wave.' Later authors, notably Peter Harrison (1983), have raised the bird's northern limit to 47°N, even occasionally 53°N, and noted that a smaller movement (than the transatlantic one) reaches northwest Africa in April.

Like those of many pelagic species, the early records of Wilson's Storm-petrels appear in retrospect rather inconsequential. The first accepted British bird was found dead in a field near Polperro, Cornwall, in August 1838 (uncannily the same year as Gould's report), but in the next 129 years, only one other stranded waif was found. For the first records of live birds offshore, all credit still goes to the legendary early seawatchers of St Ives and St George's Channel, these waters producing five records from 1969 to 1983. The first clear indication of how many really were out of sight over the western horizon came from 46 birds seen on an Irish 'pelagic' only 40 km off Dursey, Co. Cork, on 23rd August 1974.

Another rather incoherent mix of British pelagic and seawatch reports began again in 1986. Then at long last, from 1997, when Bob Flood and his team jumped onto the shark boats that fished south and west of Scilly, a regular annual presence in those waters was demonstrated. This can last from June to September and present up to eight birds a trip (Flood 2003, Flood & Fisher 2005). No-one now doubts that the clockwise loop of the Wilson's Storm-petrel in the North Atlantic includes the Western Approaches (and the gap between most Scilly fixes and Gould's Land's End report is down to a mere 50 km).

Other modern reports demonstrate that from the normal loop, a few birds move on north and even enter the North and Baltic Sea (e.g. Kitching 2002). Quite exceptionally, in July 1988, one was caught in a European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* colony in Iceland and, in November 1980, another landed on a ship west of Spitzbergen (Alström *et al.* 1991). Expert guidance of the identification of Wilson's Storm-petrel (and the pitfall of worn European Storm-petrel) was given by Flood (2003). The recent (2000–04) rejection rate has been 3%. So, next, where are the Madeiran Storm-petrels *Oceanodroma castro*?

Fisher, J., & Lockley, R. M. 1954. *Seabirds*. Collins, London.

Flood, R. 2003. Wilson's Petrels off the Isles of Scilly, 2000–2002. *Birding World* 16: 210–218.

—, & Fisher, A. 2005. Wilson's Petrels off the Isles of Scilly: a five-year analysis, 2000–2004. *Birding World* 18: 247–249.

Harrison, P. 1983. *Seabirds: an identification guide*. Croom Helm, Beckenham.

Kitching, M. 2002. The Wilson's Petrel off Northumberland – the first British North Sea record. *Birding World* 15: 390–391.

Roberts, B. B. 1940. The life cycle of Wilson's Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* (Kuhl). *British Graham Land Expedition 1934–37*

*Scientific Reports* 1: 141–194. British Museum, London.

(Breeds on rocky coastlines and offshore islands of Antarctic. Migrates N to winter throughout southern oceans, N to C North Atlantic along E seaboard of North America N to Newfoundland, Canada, and E to Bay of Biscay in W Europe.)



Iain Leach

2. Green-backed Heron *Butorides virescens*, Red Wharf Bay, Anglesey, November 2005.

## Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* (250, 218, 0)

2004 Montgomeryshire Welshpool, juvenile, 29th October, photo (P. Grassi).

2004 Outer Hebrides St Kilda, ♂, 26th May, photo (S. Bain, D. Guy).

(Widespread, patchy and declining in Europe N to 53°N. To E, breeds to 60°N in Russia, and E to Kazakhstan. W Palearctic population migratory, wintering mainly in E Africa from Sudan and Ethiopia S. Other populations largely resident or dispersive in N Indian subcontinent, sub-Saharan Africa and Australia.)

## Green-backed Heron *Butorides virescens* (1, 3, 1)

Anglesey Red Wharf Bay, 7th–20th November, photo (A. Bowdin, A. Davies *et al.* per *Birding World*) (*Brit. Birds* 99: plate 17; plate 2).

The first for Wales and only the fifth for Britain, the previous records being from Cornwall in November 1889, East Yorkshire in November–December 1982, Lothian in October 1987 and Lincolnshire in September–October 2001. Remarkably, photographs revealed that the Anglesey bird shared identical plumage and moult features with the individual involved in the first record for Ireland, at Schull, Co. Cork, on 11th–13th October 2005. It seems almost certain, therefore, that these records actually relate to one individual.

(Breeds SE Canada, throughout E USA and Mexico. N populations winter from S USA through C America to N South America.)

## Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* (75, 59, 3)

Devon Newton Abbot, 4th–13th October, photo (M. R. A. & R. E. Bailey, M. R. Langman *et al.*), probably present from 2nd (plate 3).

Fife Kilconquhar Loch, 22nd May, photo (T. Moodie *et al.*).

Somerset Catcott Lows, 19th June (B. Barnes, R. Hastings).

(Western Palearctic breeding population small and fragmented, centred on Mediterranean basin, from southern Spain to Black Sea and east to Kazakhstan, with large population in Danube Delta. Western Palearctic population migratory, wintering in northern tropical Africa. African population largely resident.)





3. Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*, Newton Abbot, Devon, October 2005.

### Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* (3, 123, 13)

Avon Kingston Seymour, 4th January to 17th April, photo (C. Craig, J. Williams *et al.*). Cambridgeshire Brampton, 28th July to 16th August (J. Lindsell *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 311).

Devon Seaton, two, 12th July, photo (A. W. Quincey); same, Colyford, 13th–18th July (B. L. MacFarlane *et al.*); same, Otter Estuary, 2nd–9th August (J. Millen *et al.*); same, Bowling Green Marsh, 16th August (M. Knott).

Dorset Abbotsbury, 14th–15th July, photo (D. Beauchamp, S. A. Groves *et al.*). Lodmoor, 20th–28th August, photo (A. & J. Sweetland *et al.*). Portland Bill, 17th November, photo (M. Cade, N. Hopper *et al.*).

Gloucestershire Frampton-on-Severn, 6th to at least 9th April (M. J. McGill, C. J. & T. Stone *et al.*).

Kent Oare, 24th May (A. W. Swandale, per B. E. Wright). Sandwich Bay, 24th May (T. N. Hodge *et al.*); 4th August (M. H. Sykes *et al.*).

Sussex, East Southease, 23rd–25th May (L. Bird *et al.*).

Sussex, West Pagham Harbour, 16th to at least 29th December (R. Carver, I. Lang, O. Mitchell *et al.*).

1995 Hertfordshire Stocker's Lake, 20th–23rd July (R. Drew *et al.*).

The 1995 Hertfordshire bird is considered to relate to a different individual from the escaped Cattle Egret of the east Asian subspecies *coromandus* that spent several months in southeast England during this time.

(In Europe, common and widespread in S Spain and Portugal with small, expanding populations in France and Italy. N populations disperse outside breeding season. Widespread resident throughout much of Africa, S and SE Asia N to S China and Japan, Australia, S USA, N and C South America.)

### Great White Egret *Ardea alba* (8, 272, 26)

Cambridgeshire Ouse Washes, 1st April (M. A. Ward).

Cheshire Budworth Mere, 7th January to 23rd March, photo (H. J. Fearn).

Cleveland Haverton Hole, 24th April; same, Cowpen Marsh, Portrack Marsh, Stockton-on-Tees, and Saltholme, 28th April (J. Regan *et al.*).

Clyde Ward's Pond, Endrick Mouth, 25th–31st March, photo (R. K. Pollock, J. T. Towill *et al.*).

Devon Horsey Island, 30th August to 1st September, colour-ringed, photo (R. Jutsum). Colyford, 1st

September (G. Haig). Pottington, two, 4th September (J. E. Wicks).

Dorset King's Park, Bournemouth, 16th July (E. D. Lloyd). Abbotsbury, two, 27th August (G. P. Green, S. A. Groves). Locality withheld, two adults, 27th August to 13th September, photo (names withheld). Hengistbury Head, 19th October (D. N. Smith).

Gloucestershire Slimbridge, 7th October (N. Warren).

Hampshire Blashford Gravel-pits, Avon Valley, 6th November 2004 to 23rd January, 17th July to at least 7th December (per J. M. Clark), colour-ringed; same as 2004 (*Brit. Birds* 98: 643).

Kent Elmley, three, 17th October, photo (L. Bacon, V. Lea *et al.*); same, Dungeness, three, 18th October (A. J. Greenland).

Leicestershire Wanlip Gravel-pits, 8th, 10th, 24th October (K. J. Goodrich, P. G. Greenhill, P. D. Williams); same, Cossington Mill, 3rd–13th November, photo (J. Montgomery *et al.*).

Norfolk Titchwell, 30th October (D. Mirecki, D. Morrison).

Shetland Eshaness, Mainland, 17th April, photo (C. & R. Mitchell); same, Hillwell, Mainland, 19th April (P. V. Harvey *et al.*). East Voe of Scalloway, Mainland, 18th June, photo (R. A. C. Johnson, G. & J. D. Okill *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 272).

Somerset Orchardleigh Lake, 16th–21st September (N. Hall, R. L. Musgrove, T. Nolan *et al.*).

Suffolk North Warren, 2nd May (R. N. Macklin, D. Thurlow *et al.*); same, Minsmere, 4th and 17th May (R. Drew *et al.*). Minsmere, 15th–17th July (R. Drew *et al.*).

Sussex, East Pett Level, 14th October (A. D. & I. J. Whitcomb).

2002 Devon Dawlish Warren, 11th May (I. W. Lakin *et al.*).

2002 Dorset Radipole Lake, two, 27th–28th July (*Brit. Birds* 96: 552); observers included T. J. Butler.

2002 Staffordshire Chillington, 17th November to 23rd March 2003 (K. Aslett *et al.*).

2003 Cheshire Fiddler's Ferry, 17th July and 3rd August (K. G. Massey).

2003 Staffordshire Blithfield Reservoir, 3rd August (M. P. Radford, D. S. Scattergood), same as Oakthorpe, Leicestershire, 24th July 2003; see also Derbyshire, 2003 (*Brit. Birds* 97: 570).

2003 Yorkshire, East Flamborough Head, two, 3rd November (P. A. Lassey).

2004 Berkshire Burghfield, 27th April (T. Barnes).

Although first named by Linnaeus from Sweden in 1758, this heron remained an accidental in north-west Europe for two centuries. Confusion reigns supreme over the early British records. Fans of George Montagu will follow his acceptance of a first bird on the River Avon, Devon, in the autumn of 1805 but for that accolade, Witherby preferred the wintering bird at Hornsea Mere, Yorkshire, in 1825 (its skin having been lost, it appears to have been mixed up with a dubious specimen from Barnsley in 1821 by Naylor (1996) and Palmer (2000)). There were seemingly six more in the nineteenth century, all but one shot, five in May, June or summer, but again two with their years of occurrence variably reported, even Witherby getting one wrong!

Much persecuted during the era of the plume trade, Great White Egret disappeared for 67 years, but after growth in the nearest breeding population (at Neusiedlersee, Austria) during the late 1940s and 1950s, three individuals turned up in southwest England in September 1948, May 1951 and August 1955. It was a false dawn, however, and it was not until the lasting recovery of the populations west and north of the Black Sea and particularly the colonisation of The Netherlands in the 1970s that the bird stopped tantalising us. After an initial foray in 1974, the Great White Egret has appeared annually since 1997.

Initially, the discoveries of overshooting, even perhaps prospecting, birds were concentrated from April to July, but since 1994 they have appeared in every month of the year in a further reflection of the virtual residence of the still-increasing Dutch and now Belgian communities. Once across the English Channel, birds roam widely, reaching west Wales and north to Shetland, and make the calculation of new arrivals tricky. Always impressive, the Great White Egret is apparently now a secure addition to our vagrant avifauna and may yet grace one of our big wetlands with nests and young. The ghosts of the ladies who started the RSPB will be cartwheeling then.

The main false alarms with large white herons are caused by the occasional albino Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* and the size misjudgment of Little Egrets *E. garzetta*. Several attempts to prove transatlantic crossings by the American race *egretta* have failed so far, but it does stray east to Bermuda (Kushlan & Hancock 2005). The American subspecies has an orange bill in breeding condition as does the Intermediate Egret *E. intermedia*, an individual of which remarkably reached Italy in June 2001

(*Birding World* 14: 247–249). The recent (2000–04) rejection rate has been over 20%.

Finally, if looking for a Great White, eyes should not pass over smaller herons. Observers seeking the former at Stone Creek, East Yorkshire, on 27th November 1982 found not only the egret but Britain's second Green-backed Heron *Butorides virescens*. The phrase 'one good heron deserves another' should have become a birding catchphrase!

Kushlan, J. A., & Hancock, J. A. 2005. *Hérons*. OUP, Oxford.

(Small, but increasing breeding population in The Netherlands and France. Elsewhere in Europe, highly fragmented breeding range from E Austria to Ukraine, but generally rare. W Palearctic population migratory, most wintering in N Africa and E Mediterranean, although recent trend to remain near breeding sites in C and NW Europe. Other populations breed across much of Africa, Asia, Australia and the Americas.)

## Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* (28, 133, 1)

Yorkshire, East Easington, 7th August (A. J. & M. F. Stoye).

1998 Highland Munlochy, first-year, 22nd July to 3rd August (D. C. & J. A. Jardine *et al.*), see also Northeast Scotland, 1998 (*Brit. Birds* 92: 560).

2004 Kent Walland Marsh, 16th September (A. Thunder, D. Walker *et al.*), see also Essex, 2004 (*Brit. Birds* 98: 644).

(Breeds from C Iberia and E France through C Europe to Russia and in small numbers in N Greece and Turkey. To E, breeds widely in small numbers in forested temperate regions of Russia and Siberia to Russian Far East. Most are migratory, wintering in Africa, S and SE Asia.)

## Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* (c. 400, 90, 1)

Caernarfonshire Porth Neigwl, immature, 27th–30th October, photo (M. Hughes *et al.*).

Norfolk Breydon Water and Berney Marshes, 3rd July 2004 to 1st April (per G. E. Dunmore) (*Brit. Birds* 98: 644); same, Stubb Mill, 11th, 14th June; same, Berney Marshes, 27th June (per G. E. Dunmore).

2004 Gloucestershire Cotswold Water Park, 2nd May (J. Davies); see also Devon, Hampshire, Wiltshire, 2004 (*Brit. Birds* 98: 644).

(Regularly breeds France and Spain, elsewhere European breeding range centred N and W of Black Sea in Ukraine and Romania, with small, declining population in Balkans. To E, breeds from Volga River to Kazakhstan. Palearctic population migratory, most wintering in E Africa, but W European population wintering Morocco and Mediterranean basin. Resident or dispersive populations occur in Africa, S Asia, Australia, E USA and the Caribbean.)

## Black Kite *Milvus migrans* (5, 344, 11)

Ayrshire Pinwherry, 7th June (R. H. Hogg).

Cheshire Moore, 20th May (P. Brewster) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 226).

Cornwall St Just, at least 6th June (M. T. Elliot).

Devon Start Point, 25th April (P. Sanders). Dawlish Warren, 8th May (L. Collins, J. E. Fortey, D. Jewell). Bowling Green Marsh, 8th June (T. H. Smith).

Dorset Arne, Poole Harbour, 26th April (M. Austin, A. Neilson).

Essex Dengie Coast, intermittently from 7th September to 15th October (R. M. Larner, G. Smith, D. Wagstaff).

Kent Hythe, 12th April (I. A. Roberts).

Sussex, East Glynleigh, 27th April (C. J. & R. K. Haggard). Boreham Bridge, 1st May (R. & S. Smith).

2001 Scilly St Mary's, 20th April (N. Gates, T. Reid *et al.*).

2002 Outer Hebrides Stornoway, Lewis, 3rd–6th May, photo (R. Reid *et al.*).

2003 Surrey Staines Moor, 29th September (R. E. Innes *et al.*).

2004 Dorset Stanpit Marsh, 12th September (L. Chappell).

Described unusually from an early plate of Daubenton by Boddaert in 1783, this nomadic scavenger was not known to Witherby to have ever bred 'far north' in Europe. Consequently, claims that it might have been a British avian antique did not prosper. The first British bird was trapped near Alnwick, Northumberland, on 11th May 1866 and it fell to the great John Hancock of the Newcastle museum to wash off a lot of blood and promote it from 'moor Buzzard' to 'Shitehawk'.

In the first half of the twentieth century, this species remained exceptionally rare, with only four



more records between 1901 and 1947. From 1966, however, its status changed in line with its improving fortunes in at least seven European regions from the Low Countries east to the Czech Republic. In the next two decades, 75 were accepted for Britain; there was a noticeable upsurge to over six per year from 1979 and 1980, when the bird began breeding in Belgium. The occurrence pattern of spring records built into a classic 'pyramid', peaking in early May, but its autumn occurrences remained just a straggle.

In the last two decades, there has been little change in its behaviour, with up to 30 accepted records per year and May still providing 55% of accepted spring records. Its reach has, however, extended north to Shetland. Looking at the mean dates for the south coast, Wales and southern England, northern England and Scotland, the most adventurous birds appear to drift northwards at about 25 miles a day; only one in ten have provided more than single-day sightings. They largely disappear in July and autumn records have remained erratic and seemingly little connected to even the most marked spring influxes. How such a large and usually sluggish raptor withdraws so secretively from Britain is a real puzzle. For every five that are seen coming in to the south coast, only one is seen going out. Just one recent bird has left through Scilly.

In 2002, 2003 and 2004, a Black Kite summered around Kinbrace, Sutherland. Might Sir Robert Sibbald, writing in 1684, have been right when he mentioned the 'black gled' as a former inhabitant of Scotland? From its breeding range in Europe, the Black Kite has also wandered to Ireland (five from 1981 to 1995) and more remarkably Iceland and Madeira. The bogey bird for Black Kite claimants is the female or immature Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, especially at distance or unusual height. The recent (2000–04) rejection rate has been a whopping 57% and county officers are urged to take care with their local claims.

(Breeds throughout continental Europe, most in Spain, France and Germany, with smaller populations in all, except maritime NW Europe and Scandinavia. To E, breeds European Russia to Kazakhstan and C Siberia. Nominate race winters Africa and NW Indian subcontinent. Other races resident or dispersive in sub-Saharan Africa, Indian subcontinent, E and SE Asia and Australia.)

## Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* (2, 19, 2)

Scilly St Martin's, juvenile, 16th September (W. H. Wagstaff *et al.*).

Shetland Sumburgh, Mainland, juvenile, 29th September (R. Riddington).

(Fragmented range on steppe grasslands from Ukraine E through Russia to 100°E and S to Kazakhstan. Occasionally breeds to W of main breeding range in Europe. Migratory, wintering throughout much of E and C Africa and the Indian subcontinent.)

## Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* (80, 690, 8)

Hampshire Martin Down, first-summer ♂, 18th June, photo (A. & J. D. Greensmith, A. S. M. Self *et al.*).

Lancashire & North Merseyside Bispham Marsh, ♀, 12th June (C. Raby); same, Middleton Ponds, 21st June (P. J. Marsh).

Lothian Broxmouth, first-summer ♂, 28th May (I. J. Andrews).

Norfolk Hickling, ♀, 5th–22nd June (P. J. Heath, D. J. Holman *et al.*). Berney Marshes, first-summer ♂, 30th August to 8th September, photo (P. R. Allard, J. Rowe *et al.*); second-summer ♂, 30th August to 6th September (P. R. Allard, J. Rowe *et al.*); juvenile, 7th September (P. R. Allard, J. Rowe *et al.*).

Suffolk Walberswick, first-summer ♂, 14th June (D. Fairhurst *et al.*).

2002 Staffordshire Essington Quarry, ♀, 25th July (I. Crutchley).

2003 Kent Capel Fleet, Sheppey, first-year ♂, 6th–12th June, photo (D. Belshaw, M. C. Buckland, R. Clements).

2003 Yorkshire, North Cleasby, ♀, 8th June (S. C. Bell).

2004 Dorset Hengistbury Head, 8th September (D. N. Smith).

2004 Norfolk Horsey, first-summer ♂, 30th May (J. J. Gilroy), same as Hickling Broad (*Brit. Birds* 98: 646).

First described by Linnaeus from the province of St Petersburg in 1766, this predator of large summer insects was spotted at four localities in Yorkshire and Norfolk in the spring of 1830. All six birds were mown down by collectors, and after some dispute the honour of the first-ever went to an April bird near Doncaster. Having got their eye in, the collectors obtained another nine from 1836 to 1854 and 34

over at least 22 years from 1858 to 1897. The birds of the nineteenth century occurred in 17 English, one Welsh and three Scottish counties, north to Aberdeen. Of 32 dated individuals, 23 were from April to July (15 in May), eight from August to October and one (in Hampshire) in January 1877.

From 1900 to 1949, there were 15 in the first 12 years but only 13 in the next 38 (though collecting was interrupted by the First World War and declined thereafter). These occurred in 13 English (six new), one Welsh (new) and four Scottish (three new) counties. Of 27 dated individuals, 18 came from April to June (eight in May) and nine from September to November, one in Fife staying until mid December. A first-ever first-year bird occurred in Norfolk on 21st September 1931. In the 1950s, the observatories managed only one bird in the place of the collectors' prior bags, but elsewhere, from 1955 to 1958, observers produced a wide scatter of ten birds. In the spring of 1959, an influx of ten included five in the New Forest, while the first-ever juvenile was found dead in Norfolk on 27th September.

When Sharrock & Sharrock (1976) analysed the 94 records from 1958 to 1972, they demonstrated a huge spring peak in mid May followed by a decreasing tail of birds into July (77% of all birds), and a much smaller but perhaps increasing recurrence in September and October (20%). They also felt that, against increasing observer numbers, the real trend was a steady decrease; but then had to acknowledge the (then) amazing influx of 1973, 39 birds in spring and five from August to October to no fewer than 25 counties, north to Shetland.

Analysing the occurrence pattern of Red-footed Falcon between 1958 and 1985, Dymond *et al.* (1985) were doubtful of any real increase and their analysis showed far less of a true autumn recurrence pattern. The long tail of birds into November could have been just the compound effect of loitering. Only another three juveniles stuck out as certain emigrants from European nests. Of the 287 records from 1955 to 1985, birds reached 49 counties, with notable concentrations in Hampshire and Dorset (46 birds), Kent (21), Suffolk, Norfolk and Lincolnshire (68) and, still rather surprisingly, Orkney and Shetland (23). Since 26 of the nineteenth-century specimens (25% of all) had been obtained inland, it was not so surprising that 25 birds (9%) had reached 16 inland counties.

From 1986, the size of the influxes remained inconstant but in 1992 the greatest recorded invasion of western Europe (with 1,220 in Denmark and The Netherlands alone) resulted in a flood of nearly 130 birds. Eighty in May and 43 new arrivals in June reached 30 counties, and more birds pushed further north than ever before. After 45 in peripheral areas of southeast England, 16 reached Highland, Northeast Scotland and the Northern Isles. Loitering was most obvious along a northerly axis from Kent (16 birds over 32 days) to Suffolk and Norfolk (perhaps 30 birds over 68 days) and onto Yorkshire (nine birds over 41 days) and even Orkney and Shetland (13 birds over 15 days). Inland birds were noted particularly in Cambridgeshire (seven birds over 14 days), Hampshire (six, all but one in the New Forest, over 36 days) and unexpectedly Somerset (eight birds over 35 days). Conversely the single birds in August and September gave no proof of fresh autumn arrivals.

The spring distribution map in Dymond *et al.* (1989) suggested that the birds' vector was a broad-front crossing of the English Channel (from Devon eastwards), then an essentially northbound extension through England north to Lancashire and Yorkshire, and eventually to northern Scotland. However, to break the rule of such clearly concentrated arrival and onward movement came 14 Irish birds (previously, west Wales and Ireland could muster only ten birds in total). In 1992, a party of five were in Co. Galway on 28th–29th April, ahead of all but two of the British flood. In 1994, four came into south and west localities on 3rd–5th May (with one on a fishing boat near the Fastnet Rock, the most southerly point of Ireland, on the first date). With four others to the north and east across Ireland from 15th to 22nd May, they made up that country's biggest influx in a year which was mediocre for the species in Britain, with only 13 in spring and only one before 12th May. With strays also known from the Canary Islands and Iceland, the case for some spring birds to have been out over the Atlantic was made.

Since 1993, influxes to Britain have been smaller, varying from four in 1993 and 1998 to 25 in 1997 and 2003. Autumn records have remained difficult to define; there was none in 1993, 1994 and 1995, but four more juveniles were identified in September 1996, 2001 and 2005 and in October 2001. Is it time to cry wolf and opine that the bird's loss of habitat, insect prey and western breeding numbers will keep it scarce from now on? Or will it surprise us yet again? Probably the latter.

Some features of the Red-footed Falcon's occurrence pattern warrant reprise. West of the Austro-

Hungarian steppe, it is now only a sporadic breeding species and even the stable Hungarian community numbered only 2,200 pairs from 1979 to 1993. Whether it or the other, much smaller east European populations supply our birds is not known. What is clearer is the origin of the spring influxes. The species exhibits a distinctly westward thrust in its autumn migrations, with most Asian birds seemingly moving due west over the Caspian and Black Seas and then with their European counterparts streaming southwest over the eastern Mediterranean to end up not in East Africa but in West Sudan and Chad. Certainly many appear later in west-central Africa, whence northbound spring movements take them back across the Sahara to the Mediterranean coast from Algeria eastwards. It is during this March-to-April surge, when flocks leaving northern Nigeria frequently number 500–1,000 birds (Elgood *et al.* 1994), that some westward displacement to Morocco and eventually western Europe occurs. Vinicombe & Cottridge (1996) saw easterly winds as part of the final approach vector to Britain. Certainly, in 1992, an unusually persistent anticyclone over Scandinavia was part of the backdrop to that year's exceptional influx, but was there any evidence of the crucial stage of unusual northward overshoot? Yes, in the shape of about 100 other Mediterranean rarities, featuring particularly 31 Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis*, a Lesser Kestrel *F. naumanni*, a Lesser Short-toed Lark *Calandrella rufescens*, three Black-eared Wheatears *Oenanthe hispanica* and five Sardinian Warblers *Sylvia melanocephala*. Many of these fellow-travellers showed the same early or similar later arrival dates as the Red-foots. Most were three to four weeks ahead of the 185 Baltic and north Russian passerines that did come on tailwinds across the North Sea from late May into June.

The status of Red-footed Falcon as an autumn vagrant has become obscure. The odds on trans-European movements are not low, given the initial departure route of some Siberian communities, but use of the term 'immature' hampers analysis. In the entire British history, only eight first-calendar-year birds, from 7th September to 21st October, point unequivocally to post-breeding dispersal. Note also that four of the juveniles occurred before Amur Falcon *F. amurensis* was found and accepted for Europe: two spring migrants crossing from Sicily to Italy in 1995 and 1997 (Corso & Dennis 1998). Corso & Clark (1998) warned that juveniles of these two species are not always separable in the field, and it seems sensible to examine Red-footed Falcons from September onwards closely. Since 1830, there have been only 60 in that month and later in autumn. For the time being, we should perhaps regard (as herein) only certain juveniles as new arrivals in that season and not ignore the possibility that they are Amurs. The recent (2000–04) rejection rate for Red-foots has been 23%.

Finally, it is clear that the concentration and regularity of observer effort has a direct influence on this falcon's geographic records. The well-watched coasts of Kent, East Anglia and Yorkshire have long since delivered far more birds than the cathedral of the New Forest. Yet over its entire history, one in ten birds has been seen inland in a total of 25 counties.

Corso, A., & Clark, W. S. 1998.  
Identification of Amur Falcon.  
*Birding World* 11: 261–268.

Corso, A., & Dennis, P. 1998.  
Amur Falcons in Italy.  
*Birding World* 11: 259–260.

Elgood, J. H., Heigham,  
J. B., Moore, A. M., Nason,  
A. M., Sharland, R. E., &  
Skinner, N. J. 1994. *The Birds of  
Nigeria*. BOU, Tring.

(Breeding range highly fragmented across wooded steppe of E Europe, from E Hungary to temperate Russia, E to Baikal region. Numbers breeding in Europe small and declining. Migratory, wintering in SW Africa.)



4. First-winter Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus* (see p. 34) with Little Auk *Alle alle*, sea area Fair Isle, west of Shetland, February 2005.

J. L. Irvine



## Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus* (c. 250, 143, 3)

At sea Sea area Fair Isle, 83 km west of Ramna Stacks, juvenile/first-winter, white-morph, 11th February (J. L. Irvine *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 117; plate 4).

Outer Hebrides Stiogha Cnap, Lewis, 17th February (T. ap Rheinallt).

Shetland Fair Isle, white-morph, 30th December 2004 to 11th January (M. A. Newell *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 88). Sandwater, Mainland, white-morph, 12th February (M. S. Chapman, S. J. Minton); same, central Mainland, 12th February to 28th March (per P. V. Harvey).

2003 Shetland West Manse, Fetlar, white-morph, 16th November (B. H. Thomason).

2004 Shetland Fair Isle, 30th December to 11th January 2005 (see above).

(Within Europe, most numerous in Iceland and Norway, with smaller populations breeding in N Sweden, Finland and Arctic Russia. To E, breeds across Arctic Siberia, Alaska, N Canada and Greenland. European birds mostly resident but high Arctic breeders from N Canada and Greenland migratory, occasionally wintering S to NW Europe.)

## Sora *Porzana carolina* (4, 9, 1)

Nottinghamshire Attenborough, adult, 12th December 2004 to 1st January, photo (per A. Hall) (*Brit. Birds* 98: 646, plates 54, 55 & 418).

Scilly St Mary's, first-winter, 23rd September to 1st November (A. & D. Curtis *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 395; plate 5).

(Breeds North America from C Canada south to C California and Maryland, USA. Migrates to winter from southern USA to C America and northern S America.)



5. First-winter *Sora Porzana carolina*, St Mary's, Scilly, October 2005.

### Little Crake *Porzana parva* (69, 38, 1)

Gloucestershire Slimbridge, juvenile, 14th September to 2nd October, photo (J. S. Lees, M. J. McGill *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 396).

(Fragmented distribution across temperate steppe of W Palearctic, from Austria through Ukraine and European Russia to W Siberia and C Kazakhstan. Small numbers occasionally breed to N and W, reaching Netherlands, Finland and Spain. Most winter in NE and E Africa, although some occur W to Senegal.)

### American Coot *Fulica americana* (0, 5, 0)

Shetland Loch of Benston, Mainland, 24th September to 1st October (P. Sclater *et al.*), presumed returning bird (*Brit. Birds* 98: 647).

(Breeds across temperate southern Canada and the USA, from Vancouver Island E to New Brunswick, and S throughout much of the USA, Mexico, the West Indies and C America, with isolated populations in N and C Andes. Northern populations migratory, wintering in southern USA, occasionally N to south Ontario, Canada.)

### Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* (131, 217, 16)

Cambridgeshire Ouse Washes, 30th April (I. Carter), see also Welney, Norfolk, below.

Cornwall Gweek, River Helford, first-winter, 24th September to 3rd October, photo (per [www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)).

Devon Bowcombe Creek, Kingsbridge Estuary, 21st April (A. Barker).

Essex Old Hall Marshes, four, including at least one pair, 11th May, photo (D. Cousins, N. J. Ransdale *et al.*).

Gloucestershire Frampton-on-Severn, two, ♂, ♀, 12th–14th May (D. B. Paynter *et al.*).

Hampshire Pennington Marshes, 21st June (A. F. & G. B. A. Blakeley), see also Kent, below.

Kent Dungeness RSPB Reserve, 22nd–23rd June, photo (D. Walker *et al.*), presumed same as Hampshire, above.

Norfolk Titchwell, since 1993, to 21st May (per G. E. Dunmore), the final year of the long-staying bird (*Brit. Birds* 87: 521, 98: 648). Holme, 29th April (J. Andrews). Welney, 2nd–5th May (J. B. Kemp *et al.*), presumed same as Cambridgeshire.

Scilly St Mary's, ♀, 10th June, photo (J. Cockram *et al.*).

Suffolk Orfordness, two, 16th May, photo (J. R. Askins).

Sussex, West Pulborough Brooks, Pulborough, ♂, 23rd–25th April, photo (C. W. Melgar *et al.*).

Sussex, East Cuckmere Valley, ♀, 1st May, photo (P. J. Wilson *et al.*).

1998 Hertfordshire Park Street Gravel-pit, 27th–28th May (J. Fearnside, L. Marshall *et al.*).

(Breeds along Atlantic coast of France and locally throughout Mediterranean basin to Black Sea. To E, breeds from S Siberia and C Asia to NW China. Most European birds winter in sub-Saharan Africa and, increasingly, in SW Iberia. Asian breeders winter across S and SE Asia and S China. Other races occur in Australasia, the Americas and Hawaii.)

### Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* (32, 58, 5)

Cambridgeshire Wicken Fen, 28th May (J. Oates *et al.*), see also Norfolk, below.

Carmarthenshire Penclacwydd National Wetlands Centre, 14th June to 13th July, photo (per [www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)).

Greater London/Essex Rainham Marshes, 2nd–5th July (P. S. Hawkins *et al.*) (plate 6).

Hampshire Farlington Marshes, adult, 1st May (R. A. Chapman, J. Crook, P. A. Gammage *et al.*).

Lancashire & North Merseyside Freckleton, adult, 23rd May (A. Gouldstone).

Norfolk Blakeney, 28th May to 9th June (D. A. & J. S. Bridges *et al.*), presumed same as Cambridgeshire, above.



6. Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*, Rainham Marshes, Greater London, July 2005.

John Carter

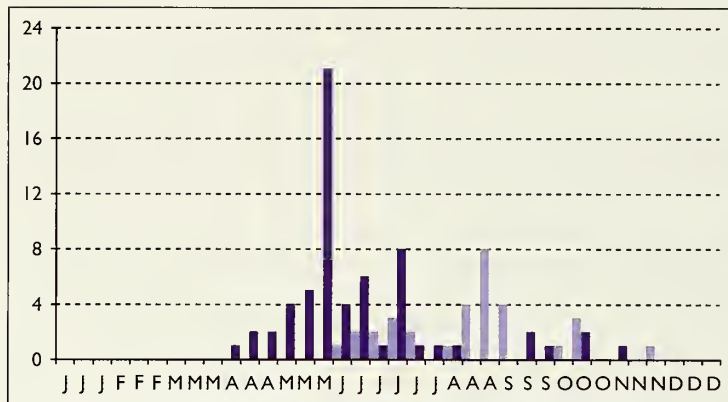


Fig. 3. Arrival dates of Collared *Glaucopis pratincola* (dark blue) and Black-winged Pratincoles *G. nordmanni* (pale blue) in Britain, 1950–2005.

The arrival of three of the five birds during May is typical for this species, in contrast to the August peak for Black-winged Pratincole *G. nordmanni* (fig. 3).

It seems possible that the Welsh bird was the Norfolk individual relocating westwards. If this was the case, it brings to mind the returning Norfolk individual of the 1990s (1994–99) that wandered widely

throughout England and was also recorded in The Netherlands. The number of Collared Pratincoles recorded in 2005 showed a welcome increase, after a number of relatively lean years, but the total is still below that of the peak years during the 1970s and early 1980s, when up to six were recorded in several years. All British records relate to the migratory nominate form.

(Breeds locally in Mediterranean basin from N Africa and S Iberia to Black Sea, most in S Spain, Portugal and Greece. To E, breeds across SW Asia to Pakistan and Kazakhstan but distribution highly fragmented. Winters sub-Saharan Africa. Other races resident in Africa.)

### Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus* (4, 40, 2)

Lothian Musselburgh, 22nd January (B. D. & M. Griffin, B. A. Hickman *et al.*).

Norfolk Breydon Water, 28th–29th March, photo (I. N. Smith *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 141).

(Breeds S Alaska, S Canada and throughout USA to Mexico. Northern breeders migratory, wintering S USA and Mexico to Columbia. Other races resident in Caribbean and South America.)

### American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* (0, 259, 16)

Anglesey Cemlyn Bay, 22nd–26th May (S. Hugheston-Roberts, R. I. Thorpe *et al.*) (plate 7).

Argyll Loch Beg, Mull, first-summer, 3rd–4th September, photo (J. Hardy, B. Raines). Oronsay, 25th–26th September (A. Schofield).

Cumbria Anthorn, first-summer, 14th August to 4th October, photo (per [www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)).

Devon Skern, juvenile, 20th–23rd December, photo (D. Churchill, R. Doble, D. E. Paull *et al.*).

Gloucestershire Frampton-on-Severn, 20th January (M. J. McGill *et al.*).

Lothian Tynninghame, juvenile, 12th–16th November, photo (K. Gillon, C. Scott *et al.*).

Norfolk Salthouse, juvenile, 3rd October (R. G. Millington). Warham Greens, adult, 26th October; same, Cley and other north-coast localities, 27th–31st October (J. Jones *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Bru, Lewis, first-winter, 30th October, photo (M. S. Scott). Butt of Lewis, Lewis, first-winter, 3rd September to 7th December, photo (T. ap Rheinalt, M. S. Scott *et al.*).

Shetland Fair Isle, juvenile, 8th–14th September, photo (M. J. Gee *et al.*). Foula, first-winter, 15th September to 10th October (A. R. Mainwood *et al.*). Fleck, Mainland, juvenile, 16th–31st October, photo (P. M. Ellis, P. V. Harvey, R. Riddington *et al.*). Gluss and Sullom, Mainland, juvenile/first-winter, 2nd–4th November (R. A. Haywood *et al.*).

Somerset Steart, juvenile, 5th November, photo (J. R. Best *et al.*).

2004 Cornwall Predannack, The Lizard, first-winter, 7th–8th, 16th October, photo (A. R. Pay, M. Tunmore).

2004 Outer Hebrides West Gerinish, South Uist, juvenile, 25th September to 24th October (J. B. Bell, R. Bonser, B. Rabbitts *et al.*), previously published with incorrect dates (*Brit. Birds* 98: 650). Torlum, Benbecula, juvenile, 2nd–9th October, photo (A. Stevenson).

The Nearctic member of the former pair of 'Lesser Golden Plovers' was first described by Muller from Santo Domingo in 1776, but its history as a British bird is surprisingly short. In spite of the shooters



producing three of the less obvious and currently rarer Pacific Golden Plover *P. fulva* in the nineteenth century, it was not until 1956 that American Golden Plover was confirmed in Britain. A moulting adult on Fair Isle on 14th–15th September was first taken to be a Grey Plover *P. squatarola* but, sticking to the puzzle, its three observers went to skins and finally nailed it.

The modern status of American Golden Plover was trailed by three veterans of the St Agnes Bird Observatory who saw a bird with dusky underwings come in by the isle's church on 30th September 1962. It was the usher to the original 'golden week' that presented what should have been a 'Taiga Merlin' *Falco columbarius columbarius* (on the same day), Least *Calidris minutilla* and White-rumped Sandpipers *C. fuscicollis* and the first two Red-eyed Vireos *Vireo olivaceus* for Britain. Christened 'Dominique' and remarkably tame, it fed on earthworms for 11 days.

With a sustained increase in effort in the southwest, new arrivals, particularly in Ireland, Scilly and Cornwall, soon appeared and were found annually after the first multiple fall (of four) in 1966. These increased markedly from the mid 1970s to 1985, owing in some opinions to greater observer awareness, and became also noticeably more widespread, with 36% of autumn records east of the main catchment area and even in Scotland. In the last two decades, the increase has been maintained, with 19 in 1999 the highest annual total; but there has been a dramatic change in the sites of occurrence of the autumn birds. Since 1996, Scilly and Cornish birds have averaged only two a year and are no longer annual. Conversely, Scottish birds are being found at four a year (eight in 2005) and are now expected regularly. Another Nearctic wader that indulges in a non-stop oceanic migration, American Goldie appears to be encountering storm deflection at higher latitudes than before. A graphical representation of the modern records from 1962 to 2003 was given in the 2003 report (*Brit. Birds* 97: 577). If, as is indicated, the number of occurrences has plateaued at around 12 a year, it could be that some of what were 'our' birds now fly on east, north of Shetland.

First recognised away from coastal or near-coastal sites in 1967, this bird has been found increasingly at truly inland localities, often within flocks of European Golden Plovers *P. apricaria*. Since 1997, such records have averaged over three a year and their pattern has shown small clusters on the uppermost Severn estuary, Gloucestershire, along the Humber estuary, Yorkshire, and even in Nottinghamshire. With eight birds discovered between November and January and no fewer than five in April, it seems likely that a few may actually winter in Britain. Another challenge for plover enthusiasts and inland patch-workers to meet.

In maritime European countries and Iceland, American Golden Plover has outnumbered Pacific by



Steve Young/Birdwatch

7. American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*, Cemlyn Bay, Anglesey, May 2005.

over two to one but, not surprisingly, elsewhere in Europe it is much the scarcer, by 14 to one.

Modern field guides appeared to have dealt thoroughly with the separation of the three 'golden' *Pluvialis*, but in 2003, a dampener came along, reducing trustworthy field characters in autumn birds to two structural characters on the folded wing (Johnson & Johnson 2004). Furthermore, apparent hybrids between European Golden and one or other of the 'Lessers' have also been reported. Observers should not forget to use their ears, although Constantine *et al.* (2006) cautioned that American and Pacific Golden Plovers can sound very similar and birders should be well acquainted with the variation in calls given by both species before attempting a specific identification based on this character. The recent (2000–04) rejection rate has been 7%.

Constantine, M., & The Sound Approach. 2006. *The Sound Approach to Birding: a guide to understanding bird sound*. The Sound Approach, Poole.

Johnson, O.W., & Johnson, P.M. 2004. Biometrics and field identification of Pacific and American Golden Plovers. *Brit. Birds* 97: 434–443.

(Breeds on coastal tundra from extreme NE Siberia, E across N Alaska and Canada to Baffin Island. Migrates over W Atlantic to wintering grounds in S South America.)

### Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* (3, 55, 2)

Cumbria Port Carlisle, 2nd July; same, Anthorn, 2nd–8th July, photo (D. J. Robson *et al.*); presumed same as Northumberland, below.

Northumberland Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, adult, 25th–26th June, photo (E. Barnes, S. J. McElwee, J. G. Steele *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 275); see also Cumbria, above.

Suffolk Levington, River Orwell, 26th–31st August, photo (W. J. Brame *et al.*).

(Breeds across Siberian tundra from Yamal Peninsula E to Chukotskiy Peninsula, including New Siberian islands, and W Alaska. Although small numbers winter regularly in Kenya and Persian Gulf, main wintering range extends from Indian subcontinent to S China and Japan, S through SE Asia to Australia, New Zealand and islands in C Pacific.)

### Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* (3, 37, 1)

Greater London/Essex Rainham Marshes, first-winter, 4th–20th December, photo (C. Bartholomew, M. Dent, H. Vaughan *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 99: plate 42).

(Breeds from Volga and Ural Rivers E across steppes of SE Russia and W Central Asia to E Kazakhstan; now rare and declining throughout much of range. Most migrate to winter in NE Africa, with smaller numbers to Pakistan and NW India.)



Hugh Harrop

8. Juvenile Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*, Grutness, Shetland, November 2005.



### Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla* (0, 76, 1)

Shetland Grutness, Mainland, juvenile, 1st–6th November, photo (D. Andrews, R. Butcher, S. Mitchell *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 99: plate 18; plate 8).

(Breeds on tundra of W Alaska, E across Arctic Canada to S Baffin Island and coastal Labrador. Has bred in extreme NE Siberia. Migrates across Great Plains and E seaboard of USA to winter in C America and shorelines of tropical South America to Brazil and Peru.)

### Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla* (4, 27, 1)

Devon South Milton Ley and Thurslestone Marsh, adult, 28th August to 7th September, photo (G. Horacek-Davis, M. R. Langman, A. V. Livett, B. Macdonald *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 344).

(Breeds in C and S Alaska, E across N Canada, to Labrador and Newfoundland. Winters in S USA, C America, the Caribbean and South America, S to Brazil and N Chile.)

### White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* (16, 372, 18)

Cambridgeshire Grafham Water, juvenile, 7th–22nd October (J. Leadley *et al.*) (plate 9).

Devon Bowling Green Marsh, adult, 3rd–5th June, photo (M. Knott, D. Stone *et al.*).

Essex East Tilbury, first-winter, 23rd–27th October, photo (P. & V. Merchant, P. Wood *et al.*).

Hampshire Farlington Marshes, adult, 27th July (J. Crook, P. A. Gammage, T. A. Lawman).

Kent Shellness, Sheppey, adult, 4th July (C. G. Bradshaw).

Lancashire & North Merseyside Skippool Creek, River Wyre, adult, 26th July to 1st August, photo (P. G. Slade *et al.*).

Lothian Bavelaw Reservoir, juvenile, 3rd–5th October (M. Griffin *et al.*).

Norfolk Titchwell, adult, 3rd July, photo (S. Howell, R. & D. Roche *et al.*). Breydon Water, adult, 18th–20th July (P. R. Allard *et al.*). Cley, adult, 12th August, photo (M. A. Golley *et al.*). Salthouse, juvenile, 13th–15th November (M. A. Golley, G. H., W. F. & W. R. H. Peplow *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Butt of Lewis, Lewis, juvenile, 8th October, photo (T. ap Rheinallt, A. Robinson). Loch Paible, North Uist, two juveniles, 8th–15th October (B. Rabbitts).

Oxfordshire Radley Ash Lagoons, juvenile, 27th October to 9th November, photo (P. Cropper *et al.*).

Scilly Tresco, juvenile, 18th September (E. A. Fisher, R. L. Flood).

Shetland Baltasound, Unst, juvenile, 11th–12th October (J. P. Cook, M. G. Pennington *et al.*). Fleck, Mainland, 16th October (P. M. Ellis, P. V. Harvey *et al.*).

2003 Outer Hebrides Loch Ordais, Lewis, juvenile/first-winter, 11th–12th October (M. S. Scott, R. D. Wemyss *et al.*).

2004 Gloucestershire Frampton-on-Severn, juvenile, 4th October (M. J. McGill, C. Martell).

Initially described by Vieillot in 1819 from a winter bird in Paraguay, what we used to call ‘Bonaparte’s Sandpiper’ was first found near Stoke Heath, Shropshire, sometime in the subsequent 20 years. It was shot and identified eventually by John Gould. No doubt alerted by its ‘backlight’, early observers found five more between 1846 and 1857 and astonishingly seven more along the south coast between 28th October and 12th November 1870. Four of the latter were shot at Instow, Devon, and the influx matched the first-ever multiple arrival of Pectoral Sandpipers *C. melanotos* bird for bird. Then, although the ‘Pecs’ continued to appear, the ‘Boney’s’ went incognito for 75 years.

With the redeployment of birdwatchers after the war, the easiest-to-identify Nearctic ‘peep’ was smartly rediscovered. Records became annual from 1957 and mounted steadily. Sharrock & Sharrock (1976) demonstrated that, by 1972, it was the third-commonest Nearctic wader and postulated that its occurrence pattern combined both direct arrivals (particularly in Ireland and the southwest) in late autumn and indirect recurrences (particularly on the east coast) in summer and early autumn. Such a dichotomy of origin was supported by the ages of the two regiments: mainly immatures and mostly adults, respectively. Dymond *et al.* (1989) followed suit and added the thought that somewhere in northern Europe there was a small breeding community. Twenty years on, this remains undiscovered (though see Gronningsaeter 2005) and, noting its extreme rarity in spring, Vinicombe & Cottridge (1996) preferred to interpret the summer birds as most likely the residue of previous autumn displacements from the western Atlantic overflight that forms the normal autumn migration strategy of this species and other Nearctic waders.





9. Juvenile White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*, Grafham Water, Cambridgeshire, October 2005.

White-rumped Sandpiper remains the third-commonest Nearctic wader to cross the Atlantic, after Pectoral and Buff-breasted Sandpipers *Tryngites subruficollis*, and up to 1996 had reached 11 other European countries east of Britain.

Sharing a white 'rump' (actually in this case uppertail-coverts) only with the larger and much more elegant Curlew Sandpiper *C. ferruginea*, the species has been spared repetitious identification papers. To end on a muted note, the annual average of only 13.4 records since 2001 is well below par for the species and birds have become much less frequent in the southwest, even in 2003 when there were many in Ireland. General opinion has it that all Yanks are now tending to hit our more northerly coasts. It would be good to see this idea tested in a general review that included a map of recent storm-track changes. The recent (2000–04) rejection rate has been 7%.

Gronningsaeter, E. 2005. White-rumped Sandpipers in Arctic Norway *Birding World* 18: 349–350.

(Breeds in N Alaska and Arctic Canada, from Mackenzie River E to S Baffin Island. Overflies W Atlantic to winter in S South America.)

## Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii* (1, 185, 10)

Cleveland Saltholme, adult, 2nd–8th September, photo (J. B. Dunnett *et al.*).

Gloucestershire Slimbridge, adult, 11th–21st August, photo (J. S. Lees, M. J. McGill *et al.*).

Hampshire Keyhaven, juvenile, 29th September to 16th October, photo (M. P. Moody *et al.*).

Kent Dungeness, juvenile, 3rd–17th October, photo (S. Davies *et al.*).

Lincolnshire Kirkby-on-Bain Gravel-pits, adult, 19th–27th September, photo (G. Hopwood *et al.*).

Northumberland Boulmer, juvenile, 11th–13th September (M. J. Sharp *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 397).

Outer Hebrides Borge, Lewis, juvenile, 3rd September, photo (T. ap Rheinallt, A. Robinson, M. S. Scott). Barra, juvenile, 16th–17th October, photo (T. ap Rheinallt, N. Wilkinson *et al.*).

Scilly St Agnes, juvenile, intermittently 1st–29th September (M. Ausden, D. Page *et al.*); same, St Mary's, 2nd–3rd September; same, Tresco, 4th–5th September; same, Bryher, intermittently 8th–24th September (per N. Hudson).

Staffordshire Chasewater Reservoir, adult, 12th September (P. Jeynes, N. Stych).

(Breeds extreme NE Siberia on Chukotskiy Peninsula and Wrangel Island, E across N Alaska and Arctic Canada, to N Baffin Island and NW Greenland. Migrates through North American interior to winter in South American Andes, from S Ecuador to Tierra del Fuego.)

Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus* (0, 21, 1)

Norfolk Burnham Norton, 10th–17th May, photo (J. Bishop, A. I. Bloomfield *et al.*); same, Titchwell, 11th–12th May, photo (P. Eele *et al.*).

(Breeds on tundra from NE Alaska to Hudson Bay. Migrates through interior and E USA to winter in C South America, from E Bolivia and S Brazil to NE Argentina. Occasionally winters N to Mexico, Caribbean and S USA.)

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus* (16, 196, 3)

Argyll Gott Bay, Tiree, 31st May to 1st June (J. Bowler, J. Burleigh, F. Hamilton).

Greater Manchester Watergrove Reservoir, 21st May, photo (S. Atkins, B. Fielding, C. Johnson).

Kent Cliffe, 14th–15th May, photo (B. E. Wright *et al.*).

1971 Greater Manchester Lightshaw Hall Flash, 31st May to 2nd June (R. Jones, C. Owen *et al.*, per I. M. McKerchar).

2004 Staffordshire Drayton Bassett, 7th–11th June; correct observers were J. Harris, S. Haynes (*Brit. Birds* 98: 654–655).

(Nominate European race breeds in boreal forest bogs of N Norway, Sweden and Finland, and into Arctic Russia, where distribution uncertain. European birds migrate through E Mediterranean, Black and Caspian Seas to winter in Persian Gulf, W India and Sri Lanka, with small numbers in coastal E Africa. E race *sibirica* breeds from Taimyr Peninsula to Kolyma River delta, and winters from Bay of Bengal through coastal SE Asia to Australia.)

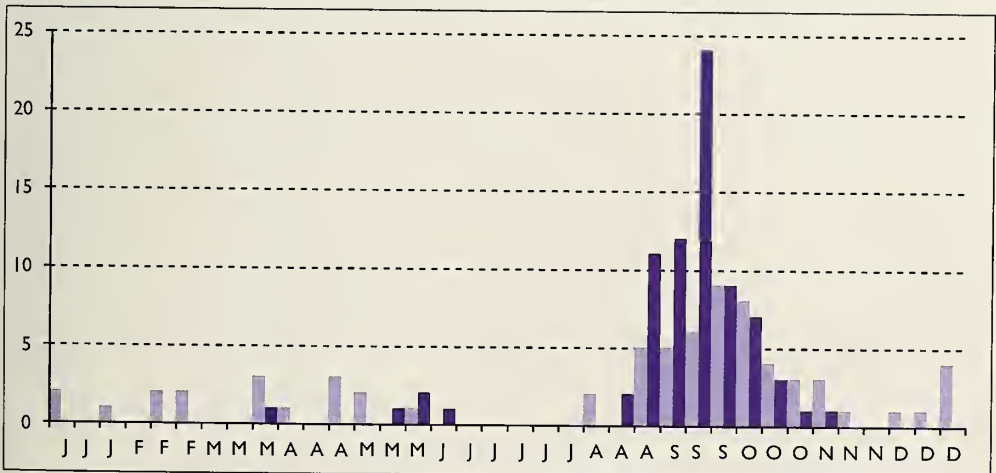
Great Snipe *Gallinago media* (492, 146, 2)

Norfolk Blakeney Point, 10th September (J. R. McCallum, R. F. Porter, A. M. Stoddart *et al.*). Holkham, 19th September (A. I. Bloomfield, V. Eve, J. R. McCallum) (fig. 5).

The two Norfolk records represent typical dates and locations for this species; the vast majority of British records have occurred in the Northern Isles and along the east coast. This species has traditionally suffered a high rejection rate since the inception of BBRC, although the key identification features are now well established. Nevertheless, Common Snipe *G. gallinago* (both large, quiet birds and recently fledged juveniles) still cause problems at some well-known migration watchpoints. It is interesting to note how the pattern of occurrence has apparently changed since 1980, as illustrated in fig. 4. Since that year, all but one bird has been recorded during the main migration periods. Between 1950 and 1979, however, almost 30% of records occurred between December and April.

Historical records show a similar pattern. While this change may result from differing population trends of the species in different geographical areas from which British vagrants arise, it seems much more likely to be a result of increased awareness of identification features. A review of Great Snipe records prior to 1980 would seem appropriate to establish whether this is indeed the case.

(Scarce and local breeder in Norway and Sweden, which hold most of declining European population. Smaller and fragmented population breeds from Poland to Estonia. Also breeds E through European Russia, W and N Siberia to Yenisey River but population trends here unknown. Winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)



**Fig. 4.** Records of Great Snipe *Gallinago media* in Britain, from 1950–1979 (light blue) and 1980–2005 (dark blue).



**Fig. 5.** Great Snipe *Gallinago media*, Holkham, Norfolk, September 2005.

### Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* (5, 166, 4)

Cheshire Inner Marsh Farm, first-winter, 12th October to 7th November, photo (per A. H. Pulsford).  
 Cornwall Drift Reservoir, juvenile, 23rd September to 16th October, photo (per [www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com))  
 (Brit. Birds 98: plate 398; 99: plate 72); same, Hayle Estuary, 18th October to 23rd April 2006, photo.  
 Essex Old Hall Marshes, juvenile, 25th September to 11th November (B. R. Root *et al.*).  
 Leicestershire Rutland Water, adult, 9th August, photo (S. M. Lister *et al.*).  
 2004 Lincolnshire Gibraltar Point, 5th July to 29th September; correct observer was P. M. Troake (Brit. Birds 98: 656).

(Breeds primarily in Arctic Siberia where range is expanding W to Lena River delta. North American range restricted to coastal tundra of W and N Alaska, and E to Mackenzie River. Migrates through USA to winter from coastal S USA to N Central America.)

### Upland Sandpiper *Bartramia longicauda* (9, 30, 2)

Avon Kingston Seymour, juvenile, 12th–26th November, photo (R. Hunt, H. Taffs *et al.*) (Brit. Birds 99: plate 19; plate 10).  
 Cornwall Nanquidno, St Just, juvenile, 27th September, photo (G. N. Smith *et al.*); same, Polgigga, St Levan, 29th September to 16th October, photo (per [www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)).  
 1964 Suffolk Minsmere, 24th September (Brit. Birds 58: 360); following review, no longer considered acceptable.

(Breeds in temperate and subarctic interior North America, from SE Alaska through NW and C Canada to mid-west and NE USA. Migrates through interior USA E of Rocky Mountains, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean to winter in South America from S Brazil to Argentina.)

### Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* (6, 119, 2)

Devon Bowling Green Marsh, adult, 28th June to 3rd July, photo (C. Bennett, B. Hutchins *et al.*).  
 Essex Holland Haven, juvenile, 28th July, photo (S. Cox, G. Gardiner, J. Sawyer *et al.*), presumed



same as Suffolk, below.

Suffolk Minsmere, juvenile, 16th–20th July (D. Fairhurst *et al.*); same, North Warren, 21st–25th July (D. Thurlow *et al.*); see also Essex, above.

(Occasionally breeds in Finland and Baltic countries to Ukraine and W Russia. To E, breeds commonly across forest-steppe region of Siberia to Mongolia and NE China. Winters commonly throughout sub-Saharan Africa, especially E Africa, and Indian subcontinent E to S China and SE Asia; also Australia.)

### Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca* (6, 20, 0)

1999 Kent Elmley, intermittently 16th–31st March (*Brit. Birds* 93: 534), now considered same as Kent 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 479) and 1997 (below).

1997 Kent Allhallows, North Kent Marshes, 21st January to 2nd February (T. E. Bowley, D. L. Davenport, J. C. Martin *et al.*); same as Kent 1996 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 479).

(Breeds from S Alaska across subarctic Canada E to Labrador and Newfoundland. Migrates throughout USA to winter in S coastal USA, C America, Caribbean and South America.)

### Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* (17, 243, 9)

Argyll Loch Gruinart, Islay, first-winter, 13th–25th September (C. R. McKay, A. Schofield *et al.*); same, Oronsay, 25th September (A. Schofield *et al.*).

Essex Holland Haven, first-winter, 11th–13th October (P. Bettis, G. Gardiner *et al.*), presumed same as Suffolk, below.

Hampshire Titchfield Haven, juvenile/first-winter, 23rd–28th October (K. Maycock *et al.*).

Lincolnshire North Killingholme, juvenile, 16th October to 22nd November, photo (R. Harvey, E. Smith *et al.*).

Norfolk Stiffkey, juvenile, 14th September 2004 to 24th April, photo (*Brit. Birds* 98: 658, plate 89).

Outer Hebrides Balgarva, South Uist, adult, 13th August to 9th September (A. Stevenson *et al.*). West Gerinish, South Uist, juvenile/first-winter, 3rd–4th October (B. Rabbitts, A. Stevenson). Butt of Lewis, Lewis, juvenile, 6th November, photo (A. Robinson, M. S. Scott).

Shetland Out Skerries, juvenile/first-winter, 27th September to 20th October, photo (P. Forrest, M. J. McKee, T. Warrick *et al.*) (plate 11).



R. M. Andrews

10. Juvenile Upland Sandpiper *Bartramia longicauda*, Kingston Seymour, Avon, November 2005.



11. Juvenile/first-winter Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*, Out Skerries, Shetland, October 2005.

Suffolk Minsmere, first-winter, 9th–11th October (D. Fairhurst, J. A. Rowlands *et al.*); see Essex, above.  
Yorkshire, North Filey Dams, Filey, first-winter, 28th September, photo (B. Hanson).

(Breeds throughout much of subarctic Alaska and Canada, E to James Bay. Migrates through USA, where some overwinter, but majority winter from Caribbean and C America to Chile and Argentina.)

### Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria* (5, 24, 1)

Scilly St Agnes, first-winter, 4th–6th November (M. E. Hicks, D. Page *et al.*).

(Breeds C and S Alaska through subarctic Canada to Quebec and Labrador. Migrates throughout USA and winters in Caribbean and C America, S to Argentina.)

### Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* (0, 63, 3)

Anglesey Cemlyn Bay, 21st–23rd June (K. G. Croft, D. Powell).

Lincolnshire Gibraltar Point, 11th July, photo (G. Garner *et al.*).

Shetland Funzie, Fetlar, 10th–13th June, photo (A. Grove *et al.*); presumed same, Haroldswick, Unst, 17th June (M. A. Maher, M. G. Pennington).

(European range restricted to small population in N Gulf of Bothnia, Finland, and Belarus. To E, breeds widely but locally throughout N Russia to E Siberia. Winters widely along coasts of S and E Africa to Persian Gulf, Indian subcontinent, SE Asia and Australasia.)

### Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius* (7, 127, 4)

Dorset Stanpit Marsh, 5th–6th June, photo (I. Southworth, D. Taylor *et al.*).

Scilly St Mary's, juvenile, 27th September to 12th October, photo (P. Kemp, T. Toohig) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 399; plate 12).

Staffordshire Belvide Reservoir, 30th–31st May (S. Nuttall *et al.*).

Yorkshire, East Easington Lagoon, 23rd October (P. Collins, B. Harriman *et al.*).

(Breeds over much of North America from W Alaska to Newfoundland and S to California, Texas and North Carolina. Some winter in coastal USA to S of breeding range but most winter in C America, Caribbean and N South America, S to N Argentina and Chile.)





Simon Stirrup

12. Juvenile Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*, St Mary's, Scilly, October 2005.

### Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor* (0, 210, 4)

Cleveland Seaton Carew, first-winter, 9th January, photo (B. J. K. Caswell, J. B. Dunnett, T. Francis *et al.*).

Devon Bowling Green Marsh, juvenile/first-winter, 18th–20th August (M. Knott *et al.*); see Hampshire, below.

Hampshire Farlington Marshes, juvenile/first-winter, 21st–25th August, photo (H. Venables *et al.*), presumed same as Devon, above (*Brit. Birds* 98; plate 346).

Northumberland Amble Braid, Hauxley, juvenile/first-winter, 2nd September, photo (G. Bowman, L. A. Robson).

Outer Hebrides Croic Deas, Bornish, first-winter, 19th–23rd September (A. Stevenson *et al.*).

The January record is unprecedented, perhaps not surprisingly for a species that winters mainly on ponds in the pampas of Argentina. Previous arrival dates in Britain were all between mid May (earliest 9th) and mid November. June is the best month in spring, while in autumn most are found from August to October, with a distinct September peak. Only two of the previous 288 records were of birds that arrived in November, although a further six lingered into that month having arrived earlier; one at Glan Conwy, Caernarfonshire, in 1989 stayed from 22nd September until 8th December.

This species has a chequered history in Britain, having been unrecorded until 1954 when one was well watched in Fife. Birds were regular in small numbers in the 1960s, followed by a notable upsurge in records in the 1970s with numbers remaining relatively high in most years until 1991, and double-figure counts in nine of those years. Since then, records have slumped and, despite a slight revival in 1997 and 1998, there have been only three records since the turn of the decade, excluding the five this year. This recent change in fortunes is perhaps related to population declines in North America, where the species is yellow-listed (of national concern) on the Audubon Watch List. On autumn migration, a small number of key sites, such as Mono Lake and the Great Salt Lake, hold a significant proportion of the population. Abstraction of water has changed the ecology of some of these highly saline lakes where the species has shown major declines. The five in 2005 might therefore be a blip rather than a true return to form.

(Breeds interior W Canada S to California, and throughout mid-west USA; also S Ontario, where population is increasing. Most migrate through interior USA and winter in South America, from Peru S to Argentina and Chile.)



## Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla* (1, 98, 53)

Angus & Dundee Carnoustie, first-winter, 5th–8th January, photo (R. A. Bramhall *et al.*).

Argyll Tiree, adult, 7th November (J. Bowler, R. Broad, P. Duncan). Machir Bay/Loch Gorm, Islay, adult, 8th–16th November, photo (M. I. Hoit, T. C. Lowe *et al.*).

Berkshire Reading, adult, 2nd December to 29th March 2006, photo (*Brit. Birds* 99: plate 101); same, Pingewood, intermittently 3rd–9th December; same, Moatlands Gravel-pits, intermittently 18th December to 10th February 2006, photo (per [www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)).

Caernarfonshire Porthmadoc Cob, adult, 16th November to at least 4th April 2006 (E. Lewis *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 99: plate 43).

Carmarthenshire Pentre Davis, first-winter, 6th November, photo (J. Friesse, D. Moore *et al.*). Sandy Water Park, Llanelli, first-winter, 25th–28th November, photo (E. A. Hunter *et al.*); same, 2nd–3rd December (I. Hainsworth *et al.*).

Ceredigion Tanybwllch, first-winter, 12th–14th November (S. Cox, M. Williams).

Cornwall Penzance, first-winter, 3rd November, photo (per [www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)); second-winter, 3rd November, photo (per [www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)). Gannel Estuary, Newquay, second-winter, 4th–5th November (S. G. Rowe *et al.*); same, Newquay, 6th November to 4th December; first-winter, 6th–12th November (S. Turner *et al.*). Looe, first-winter, 5th November (M. D. & K. Rayment). Marazion, second-winter, 7th November, photo (D. S. Flumm *et al.*). Drift Reservoir, adult, 9th–19th November (J. Hawkey *et al.*). Sennen, two first-winters, 9th–13th November (M. T. Elliot *et al.*); first-winter, 27th–28th November (M. T. Elliot *et al.*). Swanpool, Falmouth, adult or second-winter, intermittently 12th–26th November, photo (per [www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)). Hayle Estuary, age uncertain, 30th December (L. P. Williams).

Devon Kingsbridge Estuary, first-winter, 5th–13th November, photo (J. Barker, S. Gotsch *et al.*). Bideford, Torridge Estuary, second-winter, 6th to at least 24th November, photo (D. Churchill, M. S. Shakespeare *et al.*) (plate 13). Brixham, Torbay, adult, 6th November to May 2006, photo (M. R. Langman,

S. J. Lees *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 99: plate 73).

Lundy, first-winter, 9th–17th November, photo (J. Leonard,

B. Samson *et al.*); adult, 11th November, found dead (J. Leonard,

B. Samson *et al.*). Warleigh Point,

Tamar Estuary, first-winter,

9th–10th November (R. Gould, S. C. Votier).

Exmouth, first-winter, 26th November to at least 10th

December, photo (I. W. Lakin).

Plym Estuary, first-winter, 26th–27th

November, photo (P. Edmonds).

Dorset Radipole Lake and Wey-

mouth Bay, first-winter, 3rd–15th

November, photo (D. J. Chown,

R. J. Groves *et al.*).

Durham Shibdon Pond, second-

winter, 4th December, photo

(P. W. Davidson, B. Pollinger *et al.*).

Glamorgan Kenfig and Sker Area,

first-winter, 4th November to at least

13th January 2006, photo

(D. G. Carrington *et al.*), also seen at

Porthcawl and Ogmere.

Gower Port Eynon, adult, 11th

November (B. Stewart).

Swansea, first-winter, 15th November, photo

(A. Lucas).

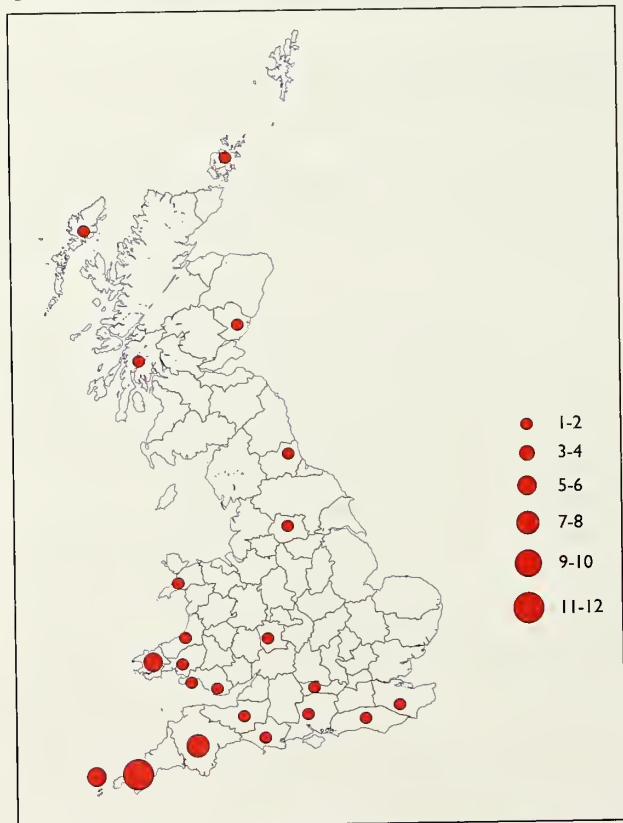


Fig. 6 Distribution of Laughing Gulls *Larus atricilla* in Britain in 2005.



John Carter

13. Second-winter Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla*, Bideford, Devon, November 2005.

Hampshire Gosport, first-winter, 5th–13th November, 11th December, photo (J. A. Norton, P. N. Raby *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 99: plate 20); same, Hill Head, 7th November, photo (M. Rafter, per J. M. Clark); same, Normandy Marsh, 20th November (J. Casson, S. K. Woolley *et al.*); same, Fareham, 22nd November (T. F. Carpenter).

Kent Dungeness, second-winter, 10th–13th November, photo (D. Walker *et al.*).

Orkney St Margaret's Hope, South Ronaldsay, adult, 28th June to 12th August, photo (P. & S. Searle *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 312).

Outer Hebrides Loch Stiapavat, Lewis, adult, intermittently 8th–18th November, photo (M. S. Scott, R. D. Wemyss *et al.*). Port Mhor Bragar, Lewis, adult, 8th–9th November, photo (A. Campbell, M. S. Scott *et al.*).

Pembrokeshire Fishguard Harbour, first-winter, 4th November (P. Grennard, A. Rogers); same, Nevern Estuary, Newport, 11th, 15th, 21st November (E. A. Hunter, C. Pierpoint). Gann Estuary, adult, 6th–11th November, 4th December (D. J. Astins, P. K. Grennard *et al.*); first-winter, 10th November, 4th December (R. Royale, S. J. Sutcliffe). Pembroke Dock, second-winter, 10th November to 9th December, photo (E. A. Hunter *et al.*); same, Llanstadwell, Cleddau Estuary, 19th November, photo (per P. Bristow); same, Neyland, 9th December. Nevern Estuary, Newport, first-winter, 21st November (E. A. Hunter, per P. Bristow). Haverfordwest, adult, 28th November to 6th December, photo (T. Theobald *et al.*).

Scilly St Mary's, four, two adults and two first-winters, 2nd November to 14th December, photo (R. L. Flood, T. Folland, J. K. Higginson, K. Webb *et al.*).

Somerset Stolford, first-winter, 6th November (B. D. Gibbs, R. L. Musgrove, C. M. Sawyer); same, Dunster Beach, 9th November (B. J. Hill).

Sussex, East Brighton Marina, first-winter, 3rd November (I. J. Whitcomb). Ovingdean, adult, 4th November (I. T. Barnard *et al.*).

Worcestershire Throckmorton, adult, 25th November (R. A. Prudden *et al.*).

Yorkshire, West Angler's Country Park, Winterset, second-winter, intermittently 6th October to 6th November (P. Smith); same, Nostell Priory, 8th, 10th October, photo (per [www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)); same, Pugney's Country Park, 10th October (per [www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)); same, Pontefract, intermittently 11th–16th October, photo (C. C. Robinson); same, Featherstone, intermittently 16th–31st October, (per [www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)), photo; same, Ackworth Moor Top, 1st, 12th, 13th Nov (L. J. Degnan).

By the end of October, it appeared that 2005 was destined to be an unremarkable year for Laughing Gull, with three typically widespread records from Angus & Dundee, Orkney and West Yorkshire. The dramatic events of November 2005 changed all that. Hurricane Wilma, the most intense hurricane recorded in the Atlantic basin, wreaked havoc in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico in mid October, and its remnants swept up the eastern seaboard of North America in the last week of October, and reached the Western Approaches by the end of the month. In its wake trailed an unprecedented influx of Laughing Gulls. The simultaneous arrival of several birds in Scilly and west Cornwall at the beginning of November first alerted birders to the influx and heralded the discovery of many more in the first week of the month. Indeed, by 10th November, doubtless assisted by another vigorous Atlantic weather system hot on the heels of Wilma, as many as 35 birds had been discovered and others continued to be found during the remainder of the month and into December. As can be seen in fig. 6, the focus of the influx centred on the southwest peninsula and Bristol Channel coast, with Scilly (4), Cornwall (12), Devon (8) and Pembrokeshire (6) between them accounting for more than half of the total of those published here. A few stragglers penetrated inland and as far north as the Western Isles, and along the English Channel as far as Kent; surprisingly, other than one in Co. Durham, none reached the North Sea coast before the end of the year. With numerous records from 2006 already awaiting consideration, the legacy of Wilma is that Laughing Gull will again figure prominently in next year's report.

The Committee has been confronted with a difficult task in establishing the number of individuals involved in this influx and wishes to acknowledge the contribution of Mashuq Ahmad, whose initial documentation and analysis of reports was a considerable help (Ahmad 2005).

Ahmad, M. 2005. Franklin's and Laughing Gulls in Britain & Ireland in November 2005. *Birding World* 18: 461–464.

(Locally common from Nova Scotia, S along E seaboard of USA to Florida and Gulf coast, the Caribbean, and C America to N Venezuela. S populations largely resident but N breeders winter within S breeding range.)

### Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan* (0, 45, 4)

Carmarthenshire Pentre Davis, first-winter, 6th–7th November, photo (D. Moore *et al.*).

Cornwall Hayle Estuary, first-winter, 1st–2nd November (L. P. Williams *et al.*). Gannel Estuary, Newquay, adult or second-winter, 4th–12th November (S. G. Rowe *et al.*); presumed same, Cubert, 5th–14th November, photo (C. Selway, per [www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)).

Northumberland Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, 2nd April, photo (J. G. Steele *et al.*).

2004 Gloucestershire Newnham-on-Severn, adult or second-winter, 22nd March (N. J. Phillips).

Records of Franklin's Gulls in Britain have so far been widely scattered in terms of dates and location, and have often defied rational explanation. Most migrants follow a narrow corridor through central USA and northeast Mexico, crossing central Mexico to the Pacific. This migration route, coupled with the gull's rarity on the eastern seaboard of North America, makes it a seemingly unlikely candidate for direct transatlantic vagrancy (BWP). The paucity of records of first-years in autumn and early winter in Europe bears testament to this theory and has tended to support the alternative view that most of our vagrants originate in the southern hemisphere, having travelled up the Atlantic from South America (Vinicombe & Cottridge 1996). In this context, the simultaneous appearance of three birds, including two first-winters, in Cornwall and Carmarthenshire in early November 2005 is significant, especially as it coincided with the unprecedented influx of Laughing Gulls in the wake of Hurricane Wilma documented above. The records associated with the fallout from Wilma provide compelling evidence that direct transatlantic vagrancy by this species, no matter how seemingly unlikely, does occur occasionally.

On a lighter note, many will empathise with the situation that confronted Derek Moore in Carmarthenshire. Having rushed home to spread the news of the discovery of the county's first Laughing Gull, on flood meadows at Pentre Davis, he returned with friends to the exact same field a couple of hours later only to find the bird had been replaced with Carmarthenshire's first Franklin's Gull! Much to Derek's relief and ultimate credit, the Laughing Gull was also being watched a short distance away by other birders, so sparing his blushes!

(Breeds locally throughout interior provinces of temperate W Canada, E to Great Lakes and S to mid-west USA. Winters along Pacific coast of South America, from Guatemala to Chile.)



**Bonaparte's Gull *Larus philadelphia* (9, 121, 4)**

Caithness Castlehill and Thurso, adult, 12th September 2004 intermittently to 15th January 2005 (*Brit. Birds* 98: 660, plate 90).

Northeast Scotland Peterhead, adult, 31st January (A. Thiel *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Luskentyre, Harris, adult, 26th February to 5th March, photo (T. ap Rheinallt *et al.*).

Balranald, North Uist, adult, 10th May, photo (B. Rabbitts *et al.*).

Shetland Veensgarth, Tingwall, adult, 17th July, photo (P. Sclater *et al.*).

1963 Lancashire & North Merseyside Morecambe, immature, 4th November, now withdrawn at observer's request (*Brit. Birds* 56: 270).

2004 Outer Hebrides North Bay, South Uist, adult, 23rd April (per A. Stevenson), same as Peninerine 18th–22nd April (*Brit. Birds* 98: 660). Peninerine and South Bay, South Uist, adult, 18th–22nd April (A. Stevenson *et al.*), previously published with incorrect date (*Brit. Birds* 98: 660).

2004 Cheshire Inner Marsh Farm, adult, 20th May (P. Wheeler *et al.*).

(Breeds widely across N North America from W and C Alaska through Canada to James Bay. Winters locally on ice-free rivers and lakes in N USA, and S along both coasts of USA to Mexico and Caribbean.)

**Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii* (0, 1, 1)**

Yorkshire, East Beacon Ponds, Kilnsea, second-summer, 1st June, photo (L. J. Degnan *et al.*).

With a breeding distribution confined to the Mediterranean basin and a specialised habitat requirement of rocky sea cliffs and offshore islets, it is perhaps not surprising that with a world population of fewer than 1,000 pairs in the early 1970s the species was then categorised as Globally Threatened. Since then, a dramatic improvement in fortunes has seen significant population growth, but the gains have not been universal across its range and the increase can be linked almost exclusively with the establishment of a colony at the tip of a long sandy peninsula of the Ebro Delta in Spain in 1981. This population grew dramatically, exceeding 11,000 pairs in 1996; in 2004, the Spanish population was estimated to be 17,000 pairs, the majority at the Ebro Delta, of a European population of <19,000 pairs (BirdLife International 2004). The species was duly removed from the list of globally threatened species, but nevertheless the concentration of two-thirds of the entire world population at a single site gives cause for concern, especially as this colony is intimately linked with the local fishing industry. The gulls feed extensively on discards from local boats and breeding success at this site is linked closely with the fishing; a fishing ban in the area in 1993 caused thousands of chicks to starve (Lambertini 1995). The fishery is regarded as unsustainable in the long term and its collapse would probably result in a rapid decline in the breeding population there.

Notwithstanding the spectacular growth in the breeding population, there have been surprisingly few records north of the breeding range; Walker (2004) listed only nine, mostly from France, although the first for Denmark, in June 2006, was close to the Swedish border, so the species is inching steadily north. Both British records were of birds in second-summer plumage, but there is no clear pattern to the age-classes of these northward vagrants, and in fact all age groups are represented. So where have our birds come from? The status of the east Mediterranean populations of Audouin's Gull is comparatively poorly known; but they are thought to be small and stable, the largest being 750–900 pairs in Greece. In contrast, the growth of the Ebro Delta colony has been spectacular, and many chicks have been ringed there (over 8,000 in the ten years up to 1991; Hoogendoorn 1995), so the metal ring sported by the Beacon Ponds bird gives some circumstantial evidence of this source – perhaps an individual moving north with Lesser Black-backed *L. fuscus* and Yellow-legged Gulls *L. michahellis* after failing to enter the Strait of Gibraltar? New colonies have recently been found in Portugal and perhaps these non-Mediterranean breeders account for some of the records farther north in western Europe. While the population in the western Mediterranean remains buoyant, further records might be expected.

Unfortunately, less than half an hour after being first spotted, the bird was spooked by a low-flying aircraft and disappeared westwards alongside a single Lesser Black-backed Gull, allowing only seven birders the chance to see it. Even on-site and long-time Spurn warden Barry Spence failed to make it in time, commendably refraining to add the bird to his impressive local list, despite seeing the two distant gulls flying off!

BirdLife International. 2004. *Birds in Europe: population estimates, trends and conservation status*. BirdLife, Cambridge.  
 Hoogendoorn, W. 1995. The Audouin's Gull in northern France. *Birding World* 8: 263–265.  
 Lambertini, M. 1995. Audouin's Gull – the future in fishermen's hands. *Birding World* 8: 261–262.  
 Walker, D. 2004. Audouin's Gull: new to Britain. *Brit. Birds* 97: 537–541.

(Breeds throughout Mediterranean basin from Spain E to Greece and Turkey, with majority breeding at Ebro Delta and Chafarinas Islands, Spain. Outside breeding season, most migrate to winter along the Atlantic seaboard of Africa, from Morocco to Senegal and Gambia.)

## Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

### North American race *L. a. smithsonianus* 'American Herring Gull' (0, 10, 2)

Cornwall Sennen, first-winter, 24th March (M. T. Elliot); juvenile/first-winter, 25th October (M. T. Elliot).

(Breeds from S Alaska E across C and N Canada to S Baffin Island, Labrador, Newfoundland and NE coastal region of USA. Many resident, others winter S to S USA and Mexico.)

## Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea* (2, 81, 4)

Norfolk Cley and Blakeney, adult, 31st December to 1st January 2006 (T. Aberdein, G. Brownlow, D. & P. Wileman *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 99: plate 44).



Hugh Harrop

14. Adult Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea*, Ringasta, Shetland, January 2005.

Northeast Scotland  
 Peterhead, adult, 29th  
 January to 11th Feb-  
 ruary (C. N. Gibbins,  
 H. E. Maggs *et al.*)  
 (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate  
 121).

Orkney Loch of  
 Tankerness, Toab,  
 adult, 8th April (K. E.  
 Hague).

Shetland Loch of  
 Brow and Ringasta,  
 Mainland, adult,  
 8th–27th January,  
 photo (R. Riddington  
*et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98:  
 plate 57; plate 14).

(Locally common on  
 tundra of NE Siberia,  
 from Lena River E to at  
 least Kolyma River. In  
 Canada, rare and local in  
 W Hudson Bay region,  
 perhaps elsewhere.  
 Siberian birds migrate  
 E past Point Barrow,  
 Alaska, in September to  
 unknown wintering areas  
 assumed to lie near edge  
 of pack ice, perhaps in  
 Bering Sea or N Pacific,  
 S to N Japan.)

## Ivory Gull *Pagophila eburnea* (102, 52, 0)

Highland Bettyhill, first-winter, 12th November 2004 to 18th January, photo (*Brit. Birds* 98: 661, plate 21).

(In Europe, only breeds in Svalbard. Elsewhere, restricted to islands in the high Arctic between Franz Josef Land and Arctic Canada, with small numbers in N and SE Greenland. Wintering range poorly known, apparently within or close to edge of pack ice.)



Iain Leach

15. Adult Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscata*, Anglesey, July 2005.

### Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscata* (13, 12, 1)

Anglesey Rhosneigr, adult, 5th July, photo (C. Bingham *et al.* per *Birding World*); same, The Skerries, 7th–10th July, photo (*Brit. Birds* 98: plates 277–279; plate 15); same, Cemlyn Bay, intermittently 10th–26th July, photo; see also Pembrokeshire, below.

Pembrokeshire Strumble Head, adult, 23rd August (G. H. Rees, A. Rogers), see also Anglesey.

Initially discovered, though not positively identified, at Rhosneigr on 5th July, this magnificent tropical tern was relocated two days later in the heart of an Arctic Tern *S. paradisaea* colony on The Skerries, where it delighted a procession of boatloads of visiting birders. On 10th July, the bird moved to the nearby tern colony at Cemlyn Bay, coincidentally the same site that hosted a well-watched Bridled Tern *O. anaethetus* in July 1988, leaving many observers with a distinct feeling of déjà vu. On 12th July, the bird made the short hop across the Irish Sea to the tern colony at Rockabill, Co. Dublin, but, amazingly, by the evening of the same day it was back at Cemlyn, which just goes to show how far our rarities can wander in a day. Thereafter, its appearances proved frustratingly intermittent and it was last reported flying out to sea from Cemlyn on 26th July. In a final twist to the tale, what was considered probably to be the same bird rewarded seawatchers with a flypast at Strumble Head, Pembrokeshire, in late August. A detailed account of the Anglesey bird was given by Davies (2005).

Although these reports take the total number of records of Sooty Tern in Britain to 25, only two others have occurred since the famous exhausted bird found in Northamptonshire in May 1980: one in Kent and East Sussex in July 1984 and another in Fife in July 1989.

Davies, A. 2005. The Sooty Tern on Anglesey. *Birding World* 18: 282–288.

(Pantropical oceanic breeder, including Caribbean. Disperses widely throughout tropical oceans.)

### Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* (46, 259, 3)

Kent Dungeness, 4th, 6th–7th, 9th–16th May, photo (S. Davies *et al.*); see also East Sussex, below.

Suffolk Landguard Point, 14th June (J. Zantboer).

Sussex, East Rye Harbour, 7th May (W. H. Truckle, B. J. Yates *et al.*), presumed same as Kent.

Sussex, West Lancing, 21st May (C. W. Melgar *et al.*); same, Selsey Bill, 22nd May (T. J. Edwards,





16. Second-summer Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*, Leighton Moss, Lancashire, July 2005.

O. Mitchell); same, West Worthing, 22nd May (J. A. Newnham); same, Shoreham-by-Sea, 26th–27th May (R. A. Ives, D. I. Smith *et al.*).

(Small population in N Germany and Denmark. Widespread though local in Spain, but colonies are isolated and small elsewhere in S Europe. To E, breeds discontinuously from Turkey and SW Russia through Kazakhstan, Mongolia and NW China, with an isolated population in NE China. European population winters in coastal W Africa, S to Gulf of Guinea. Asian populations winter from Persian Gulf to Indian subcontinent and SE Asia. Other races occur in Australia and the Americas.)

### Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* (27, 246, 5)

Caernarfonshire Bardsey, immature, 12th October (S. D. Stansfield *et al.*).

Lancashire & North Merseyside Leighton Moss, second-summer, 16th July, photo (A. & J. Rimmer) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 313; plate 16).

Norfolk Breydon Water and Berney Marshes, 19th June (J. Rowe).

Sussex, East Porto Bello, Brighton, 8th July (D. H. Howey).

Yorkshire, East Spurn, 5th August (G. Taylor *et al.*).

(Isolated and declining European population breeds on Baltic coasts of Estonia, Sweden and Finland to head of Gulf of Bothnia. To E, fragmented populations from Black Sea coast of Ukraine across steppe-lake region of C Asia to NW Mongolia and E China. European birds winter in W Africa to Gulf of Guinea, while Asian populations winter on coasts to S of breeding range. Other populations in Australia, S Africa and North America.)

### Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* (22, 115, 9)

Berkshire Colebrook Lake, 21st–23rd, 27th May (B. Archer, J. M. Clark *et al.*); see also Hampshire and Surrey.

Cheshire Woolston Eyes, four, 19th May (A. Patterson); same, Ashton's Flash, four, 19th–20th May (P. Brewster, H. J. Fearn *et al.*); see also Staffordshire.

Devon Exminster Marshes, adult, 9th May (J. R. Diamond, J. Waldon *et al.*); same, Exe Estuary, 9th May (per M. R. Langman).

Gloucestershire Cotswold Water Park, 24th–26th May, photo (K. Milsom *et al.*); see also Wiltshire, below.

Hampshire Titchfield Haven, 20th May, photo (R. J. Carpenter, P. Davidson *et al.*). Tundry Pond, 20th May; same, Fleet Pond, 20th–21st May (B. Campbell *et al.*); see also Berkshire and Surrey.

Norfolk Hockwold Washes, adult, 2nd May, photo (J. V. Bhalerao), see also Suffolk.

Staffordshire Keele, four, 20th May (M. Sutton), see also Cheshire.

Suffolk Lakenheath, 2nd May, photo (J. Zantboer *et al.*); see also Norfolk.

Surrey King George VI and Staines Reservoirs, second-summer, 22nd–25th May, photo (A. V. Moon *et al.*); see also Berkshire and Hampshire.

Wiltshire Cotswold Water Park, adult, 24th–25th May (M. J. Hamzija, L. Mynott, R. Turner *et al.*), see also Gloucestershire.

(Opportunistic and erratic breeder through S and E Europe, from Iberia to Poland. Numerous and widespread from N Black Sea E to W Kazakhstan, with Volga/Ural River complex holding most of European population. Winters in tropical W and C Africa and from Nile delta to E Africa. Other populations in Indian subcontinent, E Asia, S Africa and Australia.)

## White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* (68, 777, 16)

Angus & Dundee Dun's Dish, adult, 14th–15th August (T. C. R. Grant *et al.*).

Avon/Somerset Axe Estuary, juvenile, 7th–12th September, photo (P. Bowyer *et al.*).

Clyde Lamington, juvenile, 14th–19th September (J. S. & V. Wilson *et al.*).

Essex East Tilbury, juvenile, 10th September (D. Bradnum).

Gloucestershire Cotswold Water Park, 14th May (K. Milsom).

Hertfordshire Wilstone Reservoir, juvenile, 31st August (R. A. Hargreaves *et al.*).

Kent Oare, juvenile, 3rd September (C. D. Abrams, G. N. Howard, J. E. Tilbrook *et al.*).

Lancashire & North Merseyside Crosby Marina, juvenile, 9th September; same, Seaforth, 9th–14th September, photo (P. Kinsella *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 400; plate 17).

Leicestershire Rutland Water, juvenile, 28th–31st August, photo (M. G. Berriman, B. Croxtall, R. M. Fray *et al.*); three, juveniles, 8th–11th September, one to 14th, photo (R. G. Bayldon, M. G. Berriman, S. M. Lister, *et al.*).

Norfolk Hickling, juvenile, 10th September (P. J. Heath).

Staffordshire Drayton Bassett, adult, 1st August, photo (per [www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)); see also Warwickshire, below.

Suffolk Minsmere, adult, 29th July (J. A. Rowlands); same, Sizewell, 29th July (R. Drew, D. Fairhurst *et al.*).

Warwickshire Dosthill Gravel-pits, adult, 1st August (A. R. Dean *et al.*); see also Staffordshire, above. Draycote Water, juvenile, 24th August (G. J. Mant *et al.*).

2003 Staffordshire Belvide Reservoir, adult, 17th July (S. Nuttall, S. A. Richards).

2004 Dorset Stanpit Marsh, second-summer, 10th August (*Brit. Birds* 98: 662); finder was D. Taylor.

2004 Greater London Barnes, juvenile, 18th August (R. Kaye).

First described by Temminck in 1815 from a vagrant to 'les bords de la Mediterranee', this beautiful marsh tern was not recognised in Britain until one of two adults on Horsey Mere, Norfolk, was shot by a Mr Rising's keeper on 17th May 1853. From 1860 to 1949, at least 67 more birds occurred in 19 English and Welsh counties and the 40 records were concentrated markedly in May and June (23) and less so in August and September (8), with an overall span in dates from March to 2nd November. Only five juvenile or immature birds were identified but the glamour of spring adults got them special attention. From five small spring flocks of up to eight birds in Norfolk, nearly all were collected as display specimens.

From 1950 to 1958, 19 more adult birds appeared but the trail of immatures was almost lost. In fact, their characteristic dark saddle had been painted accurately by George Lodge in *The Handbook* plate but it took its reprise by Williamson (1960) to get the character widely appreciated by observers. From 1960, the records of young birds in autumn increased rapidly and spring adults were never again to dominate the annual occurrence pattern. The size of their occasional parties also shrank, never to exceed three.

Over the last 20 years, and notwithstanding the record 49 in 1992, White-winged Blacks have con-

Steve Young/Birdwatch



17. Juvenile White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*, Seaforth, Merseyside, September 2005.



Kit Day

18. Adult Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*, Happisburgh, Norfolk, July 2005.

tinued to occur at the established average of 17 per year. A sample of 147 aged birds (from 1986 to 1996) splits into 58% adults or subadults, peaking in July, and 42% birds of the year, peaking in August and September. These birds reached 46 counties in England, Scotland and Wales; Norfolk is no longer the *locus classicus*, that honour having passed to Kent.

Westward surges across Europe are well known but in May 1997, an unprecedented influx into Sweden and Denmark was not sufficiently driven for birds to cross the southern North Sea. Even so, individuals have reached Ireland, Faeroes, Iceland and Madeira. Such long oceanic drifts are truly remarkable since White-winged Blacks winter almost entirely inland in Africa, shunning that continent's coasts (unlike Black Tern *C. nigra*).

The recent (2000–04) rejection rate has been 10%. As is the case with other steppe-loving birds, the tendency of White-winged Black Tern to far-flung vagrancy is not understood. Occasional breeding in western Europe has never been sustained and more drainage of east European marshes could make it a real rarity once again.

Williamson, K. 1960. Juvenile and winter plumages of marsh terns. *Brit. Birds* 53: 243–252.

(W limit of European range from Poland to Hungary, where local, with sporadic breeding to W. Breeds commonly from Belarus, W Russia and Ukraine E to S Siberia, N Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Russian Far East and NE China, but absent from large areas. Winters throughout sub-Saharan Africa, Indian subcontinent, SE Asia and N Australia.)

### Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis* (0, 8, 1)

Norfolk Cromer, adult, 16th July (M. P. Lee, R. B. Votier *et al.*); same, various locations along north and northeast Norfolk coast, 16th–20th July (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 314; plate 18); see also Suffolk, below.

Suffolk Minsmere, 20th–21st July (D. Fairhurst, M. Wright *et al.*); same, Bawdsey, 22nd July, photo (I. Lockwood *et al.*); see also Norfolk.



The long stay of the famous 'Elsie' (which returned to the Farne Islands, in Northumberland, every summer between 1984 and 1997) perhaps encouraged observers to take this species almost for granted as an annual visitor. In fact, the last new arrival was in 1998 and the recent run of blank years has highlighted that this is a genuinely rare bird in Britain. Its identification, unlike that of some other large orange-billed terns, is relatively easy given a good view. The 2005 bird appeared to be in poor health on the last date, and might well have died in the vicinity of Bawdsey.

(Mediterranean population breeds Libya on offshore islands, winters coastal W Africa. Others breed Red Sea, Arabian Gulf and coastal N Australia dispersing throughout tropical Indian Ocean.)

### Brünnich's Guillemot *Uria lomvia* (1, 35, 1)

Shetland Lerwick, Mainland, and Bressay, 30th November to 20th December, photo (M. Heubeck, R. M. Mellor *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 99: plate 21; plate 19).

1982 Highland Golspie, 24th December (A. R. Mainwood), found dead.

Only the 12th live individual to be seen from our shores, and the first since another in Shetland in December 1997. There has long been a suspicion that this species winters annually in small numbers in northern coastal waters and that it is being overlooked, particularly in Shetland. The facts, however, suggest that the species is a genuinely rare visitor. Since 1980, over 15,000 Common Guillemots *U. aalge* have been picked up dead from beaches in Shetland during systematic monthly beached-bird surveys, but just three have been Brünnich's Guillemots. Common Guillemots winter in Shetland in relatively small numbers although in occasional years thousands may occur inshore, usually as a result of an abundance of food, or, in contrast, as part of a 'wreck' of starving birds.

Sadly, the population of Brünnich's Guillemot has declined markedly, particularly in the northwest of its range, owing to hunting pressure in the breeding season off Greenland and during the winter off Newfoundland. Vagrants to our shores, however, are considered to come from the Russian Arctic population, which seems to be faring slightly better. So observers should continue to check any distant black-and-white auk that resembles a giant Little Auk *Alle alle*. Of the 12 live individuals recorded in Britain, nine have occurred between 16th October and 27th March, with the other three in June and July. It would therefore seem that some individuals that have wandered well south of the normal wintering areas join flocks of Common Guillemots and then return to their breeding colonies with them. The Lerwick individual proved extremely popular, and sparked the biggest Shetland twitch for some



Hugh Harrop

19. Brünnich's Guillemot *Uria lomvia*, Lerwick, Shetland, December 2005.



20. First-summer Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius*, Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex, April 2005.

years; it was the first available to many birdwatchers since one that took up residence in a Common Guillemot colony at Sumburgh Head, Shetland, from 16th June to 12th July 1989.

(Apparently declining, but huge colonies remain in Greenland, Iceland, Svalbard and Novaya Zemlya, with small population in NE Norway. Outside Europe, breeds on islands off N Siberia into Bering Sea, S to Kuril, Kommander, Aleutian and Pribilof Islands. Also W Alaska and N Canada from Baffin Island to Hudson Bay, Labrador coast and W Greenland. Winters among open leads in pack ice or at sea from Barents Sea S to N Norway, S Greenland, and along Labrador coast S to NE USA. Other populations winter in N Pacific, S to N Japan.)

### Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius* (3, 37, 1)

Sussex, West Shoreham-by-Sea, first-summer, 3rd April (D. M. Perry); same, Worthing, 6th–9th April, photo (J. A. Hobson, C. W. Melgar *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 142; plate 20).

(Common summer migrant to Spain, rare and local breeder in Portugal, S France and E to Greece. W Asian population uncommon, breeding discontinuously from C Turkey, Cyprus, Israel and Jordan to N Iraq and SW Iran. Palearctic breeders winter in sub-Saharan Africa but range uncertain owing to overlap with African populations.)

### Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus* (166, 159, 7)

Argyll Tiree, ♀/immature, 29th January (J. Bowler, J. Christie *et al.*); presumed same as Outer Hebrides 2004 (*Brit. Birds* 98: 664); see also Outer Hebrides, below.

Orkney Stronsay, ♂, 28th–29th March, photo (J. F. Holloway, R. F. Rendall, H. Stout).

Outer Hebrides Balranald, North Uist, age uncertain, 26th April to 1st May (D. MacCuish, A. MacDonald, B. Rabbitts *et al.*); presumed same as Outer Hebrides 2004 (*Brit. Birds* 98: 664); see also Argyll, above. Mangersta, Lewis, immature ♂, 11th to at least 14th June (P. Godolphin *et al.*, per A. Stevenson), probably also seen in April, 13th November (T. ap Rheinnalt); same, Carloway, Lewis, 30th June to 1st July, photo (M. S. Scott); same, Bru, Lewis, 29th September to 22nd October, photo (A. Robinson, M. S. Scott *et al.*). St Kilda, ♀ or heavily marked ♂, 10th–11th May (S. Bain, C. Black, N. Mitchell); same, Malaclete, North Uist, 18th May to September (B. Rabbitts *et al.*). South Ford, South Uist, age uncertain, 17th–31st May, photo (R. Hissett, B. Rabbitts *et al.*); same, Borge, Benbecula, 13th–28th June (K. Joynes, A. Stevenson *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 280). St Kilda, ♂, 24th–26th May (P. V. Harvey, C. A. & G. J. Whitby *et al.*).

Shetland Fair Isle, immature ♂, 2nd April, photo (D. N. Shaw *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 143).  
 Hermaness, Unst, immature ♂, 4th May, photo (M. A. Maher, G. Thomas *et al.*).

(Occasionally breeds in N Scandinavia and Iceland, depending on availability of small mammals. Outside Europe, erratic circumpolar breeder among tundra and N islands of Arctic Russia, Siberia, Alaska, Canada and N Greenland. Most disperse S in winter, but some resident or nomadic if food available.)

## Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica* (0, 13, 6)

Anglesey Penmon, 2nd November (J. Latham).

Cheshire Woolston Eyes, 5th November (P. Dalglish, A. Hitchmough, T. Westhead *et al.*).

Devon Berry Head, 5th November (B. R. MacDonald *et al.*).

Northumberland Holy Island, 2nd November, photo (M. P. Frankis, A. Hall *et al.*).

Scilly St Mary's, 30th–31st October, photo (M. Goodey *et al.*); same, St Agnes, 2nd November (D. Page).

Yorkshire, East Spurn, 4th November (A. A. Hutt, M. F. Stoyke *et al.*).

For some time BBRC has wondered about the problem of separating Chimney Swift from Vaux's Swift *C. vauxi* when faced with a vagrant *Chaetura*. We asked Al Jaramillo and Paul Lehman in North America about this and got the following answer:

'If we exclude tropical breeding population of Vaux's Swift, then they are separable from Chimney in the field. With experience, it is not impossible to make the identification but the problem is that it does require a degree of comparative experience as the differences are subtle. Vaux's are little guys, Chimneys are pretty big for the genus. In shape they are similar, but Vaux's looks smaller-winged, with Chimney having a more substantial wing area. Vaux's has a quicker but lighter flapping style, Chimney is slower and more powerful (if I can really use that term in relation to *Chaetura*). They do differ in plumage, but these are relative differences in how light or dark they are on different parts of the body (general body colour, paleness of throat, paleness of rump, etc.). However, it is debatable whether it could be used on a lone bird and would be of very limited value in the UK where most birders are familiar only with Common Swifts. In comparison with Common Swift, a Chimney will be tiny with very fast wing-beats, so Vaux's would thus seem very similar.

'Chimney is the long-distance migrant, and certainly the one that is more powerful on the wing. If a *Chaetura* occurs in Britain, the odds are overwhelmingly that it will be a Chimney Swift. Vaux's undertake much shorter migrations. They do occur very rarely or casually in very late fall and winter – when there are no Chimney Swifts in the USA – along the Gulf Coast states all the way to Florida, while there are some winter records of Vaux's for California. But that's it, with no other records in eastern USA and certainly none anywhere close to the northeast or eastern Canada.'

The general feeling was that the chances of a Vaux's making it to Europe are so small that they are probably not worth considering. However, BBRC intends to examine all photographs of previous Chimney Swifts to see whether we can rule out Vaux's conclusively.

With six accepted records (and a further two still under consideration), this has been an excellent year for the species, overtaking 1999 as the best year ever.

(Breeds S Canada and throughout USA E of Rockies to Gulf of Mexico. Winters upper Amazon basin, Peru, and perhaps elsewhere in South America.)

## Alpine Swift *Apus melba* (92, 474, 8)

Cambridgeshire Fowlmere, 12th July (P. Herkenrath).

Hampshire Brownwich Cliffs, Lee-on-Solent, 30th October (G. Osborne).

Suffolk Minsmere, 5th April (D. Fairhurst *et al.*); same, Sizewell, 5th–6th April (D. Fairhurst *et al.*);

same, Thorpeness, 7th April (J. H. Grant). Walberswick, 14th June (P. Green, R. Harvey).

Surrey Walton Reservoirs, 30th April (S. J. Spooner).

Wight, Isle of Osborne, 20th May (D. T. Biggs).

Yorkshire, East Sammy's Point, Easington, 25th May (A. J. & M. F. Stoyke). Spurn, 29th May (N. Pickering, A. Roadhouse).

2004 Norfolk Scratby, 22nd April (A. Grieve).

2004 Suffolk Minsmere, 4th April (J. Brown, N. Loth *et al.*).



First described by Linnaeus from Gibraltar in 1758, the Alpine Swift became British when one flew into a house at Dover on 20th August 1830. Always eye-catching when cleaving the sky, another 90 birds were obtained or seen in the nineteenth century and up to 1950. It was one of the few 'common' rarities before modern times; birds were seen in every month from March to November, with a peak in May but most (60%) from July to October. Twenty-seven birds appeared in nine parties of up to 9 members.

Between 1950 and 1985, at least another 196 were seen. The spread of dates was the same but, over the 36 years, birds from March to June provided 57% of the total, while the autumn ones presented a pyramid peaking in September. Apart from one record of two together, all were singles.

In terms of its distribution in Britain, the spring and autumn maps in Dymond *et al.* (1989) displayed an uncannily similar spread in England, Wales and Ireland. Did this mean that most birds were then simply retracing their aerial flights on the way south? One was not – a Swiss fledgling that was recovered on Scilly on 24th September 1969. Given an average breeding cycle, it had been on the wing for around 60 days to end up about 15°W and 3°N of its nest.

From 1986 to 2004, at least 167 were found, including four instances of two together. There was none in November and the seasonal balance changed dramatically. Birds from March to June provided 70% of the total, while the autumn records collapsed after July with August to October birds comprising merely 15% of the total.

Over the entire record of the species since 1830, it has been surprisingly frequent in July, with 50 birds close to the 55 in June and latterly overtaking the 41 in August and 48 in September. As most Alpine Swifts do not form pair bonds or breed until their second or third year, it may be that most of our birds are sexually immature wanderers that overshoot their European crags and then linger in our upper airspace.

With some range expansion in Europe, the Alpine Swift has recently reached Iceland and occurs almost annually in Fennoscandia. The recent increase in British spring records is striking, at 40% (comparing 1950–84 and 1985 to date), but allowing for increased and wider autumn coverage, the species is clearly much less numerous and regular from August to November. The recent (2000–04) rejection rate has been 10%.

(Breeds discontinuously in NW Africa and throughout S Europe, N to C France and Switzerland, to Ukraine. To E, breeds locally through Turkey and Caucasus to Iran, Afghanistan and N Pakistan. Winter range unknown, but assumed to be in Afrotropics or W India where separation of local populations from northern migrants not possible.)

### Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* (0, 53, 8)

Cleveland South Gare, 2nd November, photo (M. D. Rowbottom *et al.*).

Norfolk Sheringham, 30th October (T. Eadson, B. J. Murphy *et al.*). Overstrand, 3rd November (G. Dormer, B. J. Murphy).

Northumberland St Mary's Wetland NR, two, 30th October, photo (S. P. Parnaby *et al.*). Newbiggin and North Blyth, 5th–6th November, photo (S. T. Holliday, J. G. Steele *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 99: plate 22; plate 21), possibly same as one of St Mary's birds.

Shetland Skaw, Whalsay, 3rd July (J. L. Irvine, B. Marshall *et al.*).

Yorkshire, East Spurn, 30th October (J. Hewitt, D. Hursthouse, B. R. Spence *et al.*).

2004 Cleveland Hummersea, 20th October (E. C. Parker).

2004 Cornwall St Levan, 4th November (N. J. & V. E. Phillips *et al.*).

2004 Kent Bockhill, St Margaret's, 15th October, photo (P. Chantler *et al.*). Walmer, Deal, 17th October (M. Hows, S. Patmore).

2004 Lincolnshire Skegness, 23rd October (K. E. Durose, D. Jenkins, J. Wright).

2004 Scilly St Mary's, 30th October (*Brit. Birds* 98: 664); observers' names should have read P. K. Greaves, M. A. Scott, G. C. Stephenson.

2004 Suffolk Southwold, 21st September (R. Drew, B. J. Small *et al.*). Minsmere, 21st October (P. Green *et al.*).

2004 Yorkshire, East Spurn, 20th October (D. P. Boyle, L. J. Degnan, S. D. Waite *et al.*).

The first British record of Pallid Swift, at Stodmarsh, Kent, in May 1978 (Harvey 1981) helped considerably to clarify the key characteristics for separating Pallid and Common Swifts *A. apus*, and opened



Stef McElwee

21. Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*, Newbiggin, Northumberland, November 2005.

the door for many ensuing records. These characteristics, however, were based chiefly on spring adults, when the differences are most pronounced, and the two species are in direct comparison. These same characters become considerably less useful in the autumn when juvenile plumage is thrown into the mix and lone individuals are involved. At the same time as the numbers of and expectation of records in late autumn are increasing, it is once again apparent that the field identification of Pallid Swift remains one of the most difficult identification challenges in British birding.

Most juvenile Common Swifts of the nominate subspecies typically leave the nest and migrate almost immediately, so this plumage is perhaps not particularly familiar to British birders, especially since it is not well illustrated in much of the literature. These juveniles have a number of pseudo-Pallid Swift features, often being paler than adult (nominate) Common Swifts with more obvious pale scaling on the underparts; a shorter tail with tail fork similar to that of Pallid; a larger white throat and white forehead (not normally apparent on adult Common Swifts of the nominate subspecies); and a paler rump, with obvious scaling contrasting with a darker mantle.

Common Swifts of the Asian subspecies *A. a. pекinensis* have a similar head pattern to that of Pallid Swifts in spring, with a much larger pale throat than on the nominate form and some pale scaling on the body. In some plumages, they have a pattern of pale and dark contrast in the upperwing very similar to Pallid Swift's, with more extensive and pronounced pale scaling on the body than in nominate Common Swifts. In short, *pekinensis* Common Swifts can be disturbingly close in overall plumage to some Pallid Swifts! This subspecies breeds considerably closer than other known vagrant swifts from Asia (Pacific Swift *Apus pacificus* and White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus*) and has a different migration route that takes birds all the way to South Africa; the frequency of their presence in western Europe is unknown, but they could potentially be quite regular.

In essence, all of the key characteristics popularly used for identifying Pallid Swifts are subtle differences of degree (particularly in the autumn) and none are diagnostic. There are differences in structure and flight, but these are only really useful in combination with a full set of plumage features. For example, to take one character, overall appearance of body plumage (in which there is even variation within subspecies/plumage types), this can be graded from palest to darkest as follows:  
Pallid Swift adults of subspecies *pallidus*

Pallid Swift adults of subspecies *brehmorum*

Common Swift juveniles of subspecies *pekinensis*

Common Swift juveniles of subspecies *apus*

Pallid Swift adults of subspecies *illyricus*

Common Swift adults of subspecies *apus*

It seems probable that as the more complex aspects of swift identification become clearer it will require exceptionally good, prolonged views, preferably with photographs, to secure the identification of a vagrant Pallid Swift and a review of some records is likely. Peter Grant's reflections following the first British record seem as apposite as ever: 'It is purely the highly mobile nature of swifts which has blighted some of the earlier claims of Pallid Swift. They just did not stay around long enough for the real possibility of a leucistic or pale-looking swift (especially one in its scaly juvenile plumage), or the slight chance of the pale Asian race *A. a. pekinensis* to be totally excluded.' Hopefully, an optimistic attitude will prevail and we will end up discovering more about the movements and identification of these fascinating birds!

Harvey, W. G. 1981. Pallid Swift: new to Britain and Ireland. *Brit. Birds* 74: 170–178.

(Locally common throughout Mediterranean basin from Iberia to Greece, but rare or absent from many regions. Outside Europe, breeds locally from Mauritania and Canary Islands across NW Africa and Middle East to Arabian Peninsula and S Iran. Most winter in N African tropics, but some remain in S Europe.)

## Pacific Swift *Apus pacificus* (0, 3, 1)

Yorkshire, East Spurn, 1st July (M. J. Pilsworth).

A single-observer, flypast vagrant swift is not the sort of record that BBRC relishes. In this case, however, the observer, Mike Pilsworth, is well known to be both reliable and accurate and he enjoys a reputation for effort and bird-finding. The submission included detailed notes on the bird's size and structure, both of which could be fully appreciated as the bird flew past among a flock of six Common Swifts. Plumage details left no doubt about the identification, surprising though the record at first appeared.

Everyone has hard-luck stories, but most are not nearly as harrowing as that of Steve Waite, the then Spurn assistant warden, who had been watching alongside Mike and had therefore turned off his radio to save battery power. Shortly before the swift appeared, Steve moved a few hundred metres further down the peninsula to check a suspected Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*. Despite frantic radio messages, Mike watched in astonishment at a total lack of response as the bird flew over and straight past Steve; sadly, he had forgotten to turn his radio back on!

(Breeds W Siberia E to Kamchatka and Japan, S to Vietnam. Northern breeders winter throughout SE Asia and S to Australia. Resident population in Himalayas.)

## Little Swift *Apus affinis* (0, 20, 1)

Norfolk Cromer, 12th–13th November, photo (G. Wright *et al.*).

2004 Gwent Skirrid Fawr, 6th June (W. Davies).

(Isolated population in NW Africa, increasing and expanding in Morocco. Breeds locally and discontinuously in Middle East from Israel to SE Iran and N along Euphrates River to SE Turkey. Largely resident, but some Middle East populations migratory. Elsewhere, resident or dispersive throughout sub-Saharan Africa and Indian subcontinent to Sri Lanka.)

## Belted Kingfisher *Ceryle alcyon* (1, 1, 1)

Northeast Scotland Peterculter, first-summer ♂, 4th–8th April, photo (I. D. Broadbent, K. Landsman *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plates 144 & 145; plate 22); see also Staffordshire and East Yorkshire, below.

Staffordshire Tixall, first-summer ♂, 1st April, photo (R. Broadbent *et al.*); see also Northeast Scotland and East Yorkshire.

Yorkshire, East Eastrington Ponds, first-summer ♂, 2nd April (C. & N. Smith); see also Northeast Scotland and Staffordshire.

Discovered by a Staffordshire birder on his local patch on 1st April, the bird duly left overnight, to the dismay of many. The next day, it put in a 15-minute appearance at a small nature reserve in East Yorkshire, some 135 km northeast of the Staffordshire sighting, before disappearing again, turning up two





Kit Day

22. First-summer male Belted Kingfisher *Ceryle alcyon*, Peterculter, Northeast Scotland, April 2005.

days later and some 385 km to the north in Northeast Scotland. Here, amazingly, the son of the Staffordshire finder was able to catch up with his dad's bird within a few miles of his home in Aberdeen.

This is the first in Britain since the long-staying first-winter male at Sladesbridge, Cornwall, from 2nd October 1979 to June 1980, then Boscathnoe Reservoir, near Penzance, on 23rd–29th August 1980. It is the first spring record for Britain, with the only other spring records in the Western Palearctic being two in Iceland (in June 1988 and May 1998).

The three British records, together

with three Irish and eight other Western Palearctic records, form a seasonal pattern best explained by mid-autumn arrivals (fig. 7), some of which go undiscovered until late autumn or winter. So, had the 2005 bird completed a recent transatlantic crossing or was it a wintering bird moving north? The weather conditions in early spring 2005 were not especially conducive to transatlantic vagrancy and the bird had no real supporting cast. So perhaps it crossed the Atlantic in autumn 2004 and had spent the winter in southern Europe or North Africa, before moving north in April. The opportunity to keep track of this bird as it moved northwards on a more or less straight line from Staffordshire to East Yorkshire and then on to Northeast Scotland is unprecedented for a transatlantic migrant.

(Breeds throughout N America from S Alaska and Labrador S to Mexico. N breeders winter S to C America, Caribbean and northern S America.)

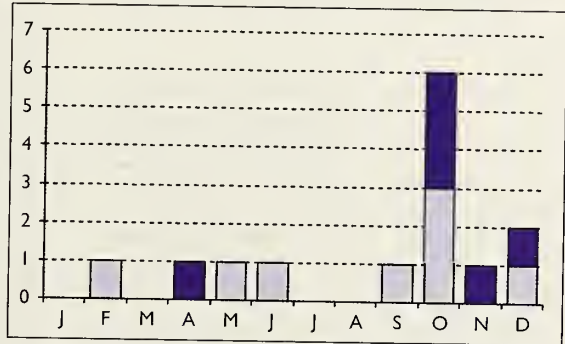


Fig. 7. Records of Belted Kingfisher *Ceryle alcyon* in the Western Palearctic (British and Irish records in dark blue, other Western Palearctic records in pale blue), by month of 'arrival'.

## European Roller *Coracias garrulus* (c. 125, 105, 1)

Pembrokeshire St David's, 1st–16th July (L. Lomax *et al.*).

(Declining, yet remains widespread and numerous in NW Africa and Spain. In E Europe, occurs locally N to Estonia and E to Ukraine but nowhere common. More common from Turkey and S Russia to S Urals, SW Siberia, S Kazakhstan and W China. Winters locally in equatorial W Africa but most in E Africa from Kenya to Zimbabwe. Another race, breeds Iran, Afghanistan and N Pakistan, and winters in E Africa.)

Part 2 of this report, covering passerines, will appear in the February issue.



# Letters

## Calls of 'Northern Bullfinches'

Further to Pennington & Meek (2006) and Fox (2006), I was based around Ivalo, Inari Lapland, in Finland from 17th May to 14th June 2006 and during that time I came across many breeding 'Northern Bullfinches' *Pyrrhula pyrrhula pyrrhula*. Initially, they were very shy and silent as many were incubating, but in June they became increasingly obvious and vocal, presumably as the young hatched. Every bird uttered the same 'trumpet call' and although occasionally a slightly shortened, quieter version could be heard, this was nothing like the familiar 'peu' call of Bullfinches in the UK. I quizzed a resident birder and excellent naturalist about this 'trumpet call'. He has Bullfinches breeding near his house, and from autumn through to spring they occur daily on his feeders and he regarded the call as 'not unusual'.

Earlier in 2006, during February–March, I had spent much time watching the courtship behaviour of resident breeding Bullfinches and Long-tailed Tits *Aegithalos caudatus* at Holkham Meals, Norfolk. On 2nd March, a female Northern Bullfinch joined the resident flock of three male and two female Bullfinches. Watching the flock almost daily, I was able to note that this bird gave only the 'trumpet call' and the local birds the typical 'peu' notes. There was never any suggestion that either form could be influenced by each other's different vocalisa-

tions. Interestingly, however, there were frequent occasions when the Northern Bullfinch could *seemingly* be heard to give the 'peu' call. For example, if I came across the group feeding together along a path, the local birds would characteristically melt away into the brambles *Rubus fruticosus* agg. and thick scrub giving a few quiet 'peu' calls, while the Northern Bullfinch was often less bothered by my presence and would remain more obvious, which could potentially lead observers into thinking that it was capable of giving both calls.

As the spring progressed, the flock split into pairs and began to frequent different territories. To my surprise, the 'Northern' female was seemingly paired to a local male. On one occasion she perched on the very top of a birch *Betula* tree and sang, on and off, for over a minute: loud, clear, flute-like notes closely resembling those heard in Inari Lapland a few months later and completely different from the quiet, subdued warbling and chattering song of British birds. This odd-sized pairing was not likely to last and I saw no further sign of her from mid March.

### References

- Fox, A. D. 2006. Calls of 'Northern Bullfinches'. *Brit. Birds* 99: 370–371.  
Pennington, M. G., & Meek, E. R. 2006. The 'Northern Bullfinch' invasion of autumn 2004. *Brit. Birds* 99: 2–24.

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## Join us – and adopt the vice-county system

In 1852, H. C. Watson devised a system for botanical surveys by which the British Isles was divided into vice-counties, areas of roughly equal size. This system was adopted by botanists and non-botanists alike. Later, it was applied to Ireland by R. L. Praeger, in 1901. Today all British and Irish naturalists use the Watsonian/Praeger vice-counties for recording purposes; all except one group, the ornithologists.

Birdwatchers still follow socio-political boundaries that are not fixed. Recent major changes to these boundaries occurred in 1974 and 1996, while in 1998 the Government Dis-

trict, County and Unitary Authorities appeared. In my own county of Dorset, the 1974 changes resulted in a literal loss of bird records which Dorset should have gained. Hampshire still holds pre-1974 records for the well-known sites of Christchurch Harbour and Hengistbury Head, as well as one or two other sites. Dorset holds the post-1974 records. At present, Dorset does not recognise the pre-1974 records of Christchurch, while it is fair to say that Hampshire no longer publishes references to any of these pre-1974 records. Bizarre inconsistencies have resulted, e.g. Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla cit-*

*reola* is not on the Dorset list, yet two were recorded at Christchurch Harbour in 1966. A great many records have disappeared into no man's land. I tried to locate all pre-1974 records for this area for a recently published book. While I wanted to follow the vice-county system, I decided to locate all the Christchurch records for scientific and historical consistency, since no Dorset county avifauna before or since has included these pre-1974 records. It wasn't easy. I have little doubt that similar experiences can be had elsewhere in the country. Future county avifaunas would be much easier to compile and more consistent in their coverage if they followed permanent boundaries.

In addition, the national Biological Records Centre, the 'sorting office' for all biological records, follows the Watsonian system, so an adoption of the system would presumably make their working lives easier. One can think of

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many more reasons for adopting such a system. The following of ever-changing socio-political boundaries seems to be rather illogical and the only reason for its continuance is that it has become institutionalised. While the adoption of the Watsonian vice-county system would not only solve the current problems but also avoid future ones, there is a minor, albeit superficial, downside. For many recorders, a belated adoption of the system would be a headache, as some current recording areas would cease to exist (no disrespect to Avon or Cleveland) and a fair amount of records will need to change hands. However, it would merely need the full co-operation of fellow county recorders and their assistants to deal with this matter.

My plea to the powers that be is that we should bite the bullet and adopt the Watsonian/Praeger system of vice-counties, the boundaries of which will never change.

## The Cambridge 'Moustached Warblers'

When I arrived in Cambridge a couple of years after 'Moustached Warblers *Acrocephalus melanopogon*' were reported there (see *Brit. Birds* 99: 465–478), I interrogated every witness I could find about this strange event. At that time, Cambridge ornithology was divided into two parts, the pre-war rather dilettante generation, notably the behaviourists, and the first twitchers, who had yet to make their mark; and there was little communication between them. The reply from the first group was uniformly that the birds had been identified by the best observers, and that it was sacrilegious for young whippersnappers to question it, but those in the second group were usually incredulous. When I got to know these birds well, wintering in Cyprus, it rapidly became evident that by far the quickest way to identify them was by their habit of regularly sitting with their tails cocked, as reported by the late great B. W. Tucker in the

*Handbook of British Birds*; and since they appeared to overlap with Sedge Warblers *A. schoenobaenus* otherwise, I ceased to look at anything else.

It was therefore interesting to read, in the recent summary of evidence for the reputed British records, that the only person who seems to have wanted to know about this most distinctive field character was again Bernard Tucker, who seems to have been worn down by unanimous peer pressure to reluctantly accept that the birds cocked their tails just like any other warbler when alarmed. There is also little reference to this behaviour in *BWP*, although it is mentioned in Beaman & Madge (*Handbook of Bird Identification*, Helm, 1998). It seems that people should stop depending on long-winded but inconclusive plumage descriptions and start to look at the behaviour of live birds again.

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# Obituary

## xx (394650-1) Michael John Rogers (1932–2006)

Mike Rogers, who died five days after his 74th birthday, was the engine room of the BBRC from 1978 until his death. Although as honorary secretary he was a non-voting participant, he played a central role in modernising the process of rarity assessment and ensuring that it kept flowing smoothly and efficiently during an era in which the volume of reported rarities mushroomed. Mike was a distinguished-looking figure, whose serious expression masked an extremely gentle nature, much personal charm and a considerable sense of humour. He was a meticulous correspondent, invariably courteous and reasonable (even when being perfectly frank), and had the rare talent of addressing young and old alike; it is through the letters and postcards sent on behalf of BBRC that the majority of Britain's birders will remember him. His modest ten-line entry in *Who's Who in Ornithology* (Pemberton, 1997) gives a misleading impression that there may not have been a great deal more to the man. It is more likely that this was a

reflection of the strong self-effacement evident through much of his adult life; he consistently shunned the limelight.

Born in Sutton Coldfield on 5th October 1932, the only child of the Head Brewer at Ansells' Brewery, Birmingham, Mike was at the forefront of the post-war birdwatching boom. Raised in the city's Ed- ington district, he was among the brightest of talented young birders who fledged from King Edward's School after the mid 1940s. He joined what is now the West Midland Bird Club (WMBC) in 1946; within a year, together with schoolmates John Rawsthorne and Alan Wolton, he was part of a young triumvirate known by adult members as 'The Kids' that cycled all over the region, their regular discoveries of unusual species earning them an early reputation. They were tolerated by the rather stuffy local senior bird- watching establishment; but sometimes they got up its nose.

At an early age, already showing signs of the bird-



23. Mike Rogers, in the early 1980s.

record-analysis skills that were to be his forte in the final third of his life, Mike compiled a map of selected species in Sutton Park and then, in 1948, a detailed CBC-type map of the breeding species at Minworth. By 1951 he was a member of the WMBC's research committee, which compiled the prototype of breeding atlases in Britain (and was referred to as such in the introduction to *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland*; Sharrock, 1976). Meanwhile, on reaching their mid teens 'The Kids' expanded their travels, with frequent visits to the north Norfolk coast, where they spent much time with legendary birdwatcher and illustrator Richard Richardson. Mike fondly recalled the effect on a literature-starved 17-year-old birder of first setting eyes on a full set of both Dresser and *The Handbook* in Peggy Meiklejohn's living room in 1949; and also that Richardson was a regular visitor to Meiklejohn's house, appearing every Tuesday evening for his weekly bath – 'the only time one would see him not wearing his army beret!' Richardson and Meiklejohn were two of his mentors in that early period, along with senior figures in the West Midlands, including Horace ('H. G.') Alexander (the latter clearly had a particular impact on Mike when he found a Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* at Northampton Sewage-farm in 1951).

One of Mike's already prodigious field skills was not just being able to identify bird calls but also to mimic them. A current senior WMBC member, Alan Richards, remembers being much impressed as he brought a flock of Common Redshanks *Tringa totanus* to the ground before them just by whistling a perfect rendition of their flight call.

It was the demands of National Service that eventually broke up 'The Kids'. After he resigned from the research committee in September 1951, Mike's route is unclear. He did not go to any university and, with no surviving close relatives to offer any clues, the next seven years are now almost a total blank to his friends. Wolton recalls that Mike spent part of that time in the Army Intelligence Corps, based at Trieste on Italy's Adriatic coast, at the southern tip of the Iron Curtain at a difficult period of the Cold War. He was married in 1957, but he and his wife Betty were not together long and there were no children. Eventually, they were divorced and Rogers was informed of her death, after progressively deteriorating health, in 1998.

The next phase of his life, from 1958 to 1981, was spent as an officer of the Metropolitan Police. As with his army days, he revealed little to friends, but they managed to glean that for much of the time he was a Special Branch officer and at some point became a detective sergeant. During his off-duty visits to the Sussex coast, fellow birders would occasionally hear him refer briefly to surveillance work at Heathrow or Gatwick, or to carrying out embassy protection. Once, in a letter, he mentioned checking passengers leaving a plane from Teheran before the 1979 Islamic Revolution and being surprised to see that they

included an old girlfriend 'just as gorgeous, even though that plastic surgery to her nose went all horribly wrong. She was married, had three kids... and five Mercs!' In a darker and more intriguing mood, he moaned on another occasion that other duties led to him becoming 'too close' to Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson; and that his reward was to end up as little more than a switchboard operator. Towards the end of his career he was seconded to the London Bomb Squad during a period of sustained IRA inactivity. He spoke of the boredom of sitting by a phone, waiting for a call to action that never came. It was then that his time became increasingly involved with ornithological work.

In 1978, he became not only the Sussex Ornithological Society's Recorder, but was also appointed BBRC Secretary, and it was the latter role that dominated the rest of his life. Soon, descriptions of rarities were pouring into his home in Sunbury-on-Thames, Middlesex, and the volume was set to increase as the interest in rare birds multiplied in the 1980s and 1990s. Few people realised just how much work this involved. The receipt and circulation of 1,000+ claims per year was in many ways the straightforward bit. Before circulation, each record required a statement on the observer and the circumstances of the observation, and at the end of the process each required a conclusion – accepted, rejected or, rarely, pending. This in turn had to be communicated to the observer, before the outcome was filed, coded and stored. Some 20,000 of these processed files lived in cardboard boxes in Mike's house. One of the many improvements he introduced to improve the efficiency of how BBRC worked was a simple scoring system to assess the likely ability of individual members to judge records. This was the ABC system: A if you knew the species well; B if you'd seen it; C if you had no experience. However, he hadn't bargained for Keith Vinicombe who, on receiving the Mottled Swift *Tachymarptis aequatorialis* file, wrote 'D: never even heard of it!'

After Mike retired from the police force in 1981, BBRC became his new full-time occupation. Showing an unrivalled capacity for coping with mountains of data, he continued as Sussex Recorder until 1983, while he was also the Recorder for Scilly between 1982 and 1990. He had been an integral part of the Scilly birding community before moving to the islands, and took great pride in having constructed the Lower Moors hide in his backyard in Sunbury-on-Thames, and later erecting it on site. Following that, he built the seaward hide at Porthellick in situ, and then designed and installed the David Hunt hide on Tresco; yet he claimed that 'I am not, nor ever have been, a skilled carpenter!' It is appropriate that his memorial fund, being co-ordinated on Scilly, is intended to provide another hide at Porthellick that will look towards one of the older, but still functional, hides that Mike helped to place there\*.

By the end of 1984 he was living full-time on St Mary's at a time when Scilly was the only place for the nation's twitchers to be in October. The annual invasion spawned a near-festival atmosphere which drew Mike out of the shadows that were so often his habitat. David Hunt was the effervescent MC at the nightly gathering in the cellar bar of the Porthcressa restaurant but, at some point in the proceedings, Mike would take centre stage to call the log, 'fag in one hand, brandy in the other'. Sadly, Hunt was killed by a tiger in India in February 1985, and although the autumn Scilly shows continued, Mike had turned his back on that scene by the end of 1987. Scilly residency had become a nightmare for him and he told BBRC colleagues that he could no longer cope with not being able to walk two yards in any direction without birders, mostly total strangers, stopping to talk to him as if he were a celebrity. He switched to mainland Cornwall, the village of Towednack, on the edge of Amalveor Downs, southwest of St Ives and nicely off the beaten track, becoming his final home.

Mike's own observations about bird identification, calls and behaviour frequently appeared in *BB*. These were mostly serious and scholarly, for example his paper on 'Ruddy Shelducks in Britain in 1965–79' (*Brit. Birds* 75: 446–455) and letter on 'Migrant White-billed Divers in Britain and Ireland' (*Brit. Birds* 90: 292–293), not forgetting the annual reports on Scarce Migrant Birds which he helped to compile for the years 1995 to 2003. Mike was a great visible-migration enthusiast, at first in his Birmingham days, when he would be out every morning in mid/late autumn, and in later years at Beachy Head in spring; and it was the latter observations which eventually gave rise to his (sadly unpublished and now abandoned) theories about the functional significance of the flock in migratory birds. Occasionally, however, he would deliver a burst of his natural wit. One particular gem (*Brit. Birds* 75: 96) is a comment on the difference between the two sand plovers. He wrote: 'I see the difference between them as lying in their character. The Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* is quite a pleasing little bird. The Greater *C. leschenaultii* strikes me as an ugly brute, with a body too small for its legs, a head too large for its body and a bill too large for its head. Perhaps, like the camel, the Greater Sand Plover was designed by a committee?'

Evidence that his teenage rebellious spirit lingered came from his enthusiasm for *Not BB*, a one-time satirical magazine lampooning the ornithological hierarchy. Former BBRC members recall his delight in lightening up dull interludes of meetings and Swanwick conferences – with some of the butts of the jokes

present – by reading out hilarious passages from the latest edition.

A mild stroke in 1991 did not stop him continuing to plough through the ever-mounting BBRC paperwork, although he admitted it meant 'my fingertips don't always do what my brain thinks.' In 1993 he founded ACRE, the Association of County Recorders and Editors, a splendid initiative which brought together all the recorders of county and regional bird clubs who channelled records to him for BBRC decisions. In 1996 he received his only honour, as an Honorary Subscriber to *British Birds*, bestowed only 11 times previously in the journal's then 89-year history. Some leading figures in ornithology felt he deserved to figure in the New Year Honours and approaches were made in the appropriate quarters but, sadly, nothing ever came of it.

The death of his mother, aged 92, in the Midlands in 1996 gave him even less reason to venture from Towednack and he became a near-recluse during his final decade. In his Christmas 2000 letter to Alan Wolton, he wrote: 'I never go anywhere but out into my large, open-view garden, partly because my legs don't work all that well – another left-over from the stroke – and partly because I am generally phobic about other birdwatchers in person.' Nonetheless, Mike continued to play a central role in BBRC almost until his death. In particular, his talents for corresponding with the birdwatching public and maintaining a phenomenal and encyclopedic grasp of the basic data – dates, sites and observers – without recourse to a computer database, remained as strong as ever until a year or two before he died, on 10th October 2006. His unwillingness to embrace the necessary evil of the computer keyboard meant him relinquishing the overall control of BBRC secretarial functions, but as the Committee switched to an electronic system of administration it was planned that Mike would still have an important role in the annual report. Regrettably, there will be no such swan song, and he will be sorely missed, not least by those who were privileged to get the occasional longer letter from him, full of enthusiasm for all birds, better bird-watchers and for *BB*, his favourite journal. There is simply no doubt that Mike Rogers had a hugely significant impact on BBRC and scarce-bird recording in general.

Brian Unwin, D. I. M. Wallace and Richard Porter

\* Donations may be sent to 'Mike Rogers Memorial Fund', c/o Nigel Hudson, Post Office Flat, Hugh Town, Scilly TR21 0LL



# News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

## New RSPB reserve... in Poland

For the first time in its history, the RSPB has made a land purchase overseas. The society is acquiring 1,000 ha of the legendary Biebrza Marshes in Poland to safeguard one of the remaining strongholds of Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*.

The RSPB's Chief Executive, Graham Wynne, said: 'Using RSPB funds to secure land purchase overseas is an exciting development for the Society. The Biebrza Marshes support 80% of the European Union's population of the globally threatened Aquatic Warbler. Without using RSPB funds to purchase land, we were concerned that this bird might not have had a secure future in its European stronghold as its last breeding sites could be lost through the intensification or abandonment of farming.'

The RSPB has provided a guarantee of £400,000 of funding as a contribution to a £3.67m EU LIFE project to manage land for the

benefit of the Aquatic Warbler, which includes land purchase where necessary. The project – which has been developed jointly by the RSPB and the Polish BirdLife partner OTOP – will create a blueprint for the management of 42,000 ha (approximately 160 square miles) of fen and wet meadow, mostly in Poland, but also in a small part of Germany. Of this, an area of over 11 square miles will be restored to pristine wetland for the benefit of Aquatic Warblers, mainland Europe's rarest songbird.

Although it breeds in eastern Europe (with the population currently estimated to be 12,000–20,000 pairs), Aquatic Warbler is one of 26 bird species covered by a Biodiversity Action Plan in the UK. This is an acknowledgment that the reedbeds of southern England provide an important refuelling stop for a small number of Aquatic Warblers that migrate regularly through the UK en route to (unknown)

wintering grounds in Africa.

Alistair Gammell, the RSPB's International Director, said: 'Since [the country joined] the EU in 2004, the nature of Poland has been presented with threats and opportunities. It is a priority for conservation groups to protect wildlife from some of the more damaging elements brought by joining the EU, such as the intensification or abandonment of farmland leading to the inevitable decline of important birds like [Northern] Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*. But the EU also brings opportunities such as the LIFE fund, through which we can take action to protect Europe's threatened wildlife.'

As previously reported (*Brit. Birds* 99: 589–590), the Biebrza Marshes and their birds are threatened by a trans-European road-building programme, the 'Via Baltica' linking Warsaw with Helsinki, that has attracted widespread protest in Poland and beyond.

## Blair backs bird-trade ban

Tony Blair has told the RSPB that the UK Government will press for a permanent ban on the importation of wild birds into Europe. The temporary ban imposed in October 2005 following the outbreak of avian influenza was up for review in December (*Brit. Birds* 99: 651), but the RSPB has campaigned for a total ban to curb the wild-bird trade and has secured powerful backing.

In a letter to RSPB Chief Executive Graham Wynne, the Prime Minister says: 'I thought you and your members would want to know that the Government is to press for the present temporary ban on wild birds being imported into the EU to be extended indefinitely. As you will know, the commercial importation of wild birds

has been halted until the end of 2006 primarily over fears that the trade could increase the risk of spreading avian flu and other diseases. This continues to be the case. But it is also true, as the RSPB campaign has graphically demonstrated, that the catching and transportation of birds also causes unacceptable levels of suffering to the birds and can have a damaging impact on their wild populations. For all these reasons, the UK intends to press other member states and the European Commission to extend indefinitely the ban on the commercial importation of wild birds – with exceptions, as I know the RSPB accepts, only for recognised conservation reasons. We believe that there may be considerable support now from other

member states and within the Commission for such a move.'

The RSPB has campaigned against the wild-bird trade for 20 years. But this is the first time that a British prime minister has given his or her unqualified support. Graham Wynne said: 'We are delighted that the UK is taking this position and Mr Blair's intervention could not be more timely. It is shameful that such an obscene trade has been allowed to continue for so long, when so many birds have died and so few people have benefited.'

At last there is hope that this dark cloud hanging over millions of wild birds may soon be gone. The support of the Government could be crucial in bringing this about.

## 'Extinct' duck resurfaces

The Madagascar Pochard *Aythya innotata* has been rediscovered 15 years after the last sighting. Fieldworkers from the Peregrine Fund (visit [www.peregrinefund.org/pochard\\_photos.asp](http://www.peregrinefund.org/pochard_photos.asp)) discovered nine adults and four young on a remote lake in northern Madagascar. The pochard was until recently listed as Critically Endangered (Possibly Extinct). The last sighting was on Lake Alaotra in the Central Plateau of Madagascar in 1991, when a male was captured and kept in Antananarivo Zoological and Botanical Gardens until its death one year later. The lack of subsequent records, despite intensive searches, and the intensity of threats to the species had led to it being tagged as Possibly Extinct. The last record of a flock was in June 1960, when 20 birds were sighted on Lake Alaotra.

Vony Raminoarisoa, Director of BirdLife International Madagascar Programme, said: 'After so much searching, and so long without a sighting, hope seemed to be fading for this species. With better knowledge about the habitat requirements of the Madagascar Pochard comes greater hopes for protecting the species and this area of marshland – a habitat on which many other threatened species may depend.'

The decline of the Madagascar Pochard is thought to have started in the mid twentieth century and has been linked with the degradation of lake and marshland habitat by introduced plant and fish species, conversion to rice paddies, and burning. Little is known about the bird, an extremely secretive and often solitary duck that prefers shallow and marshy habitat.

'The finding encourages us to consider more seriously the possibility that Madagascar's other Possibly Extinct waterbird, the Alaotra Grebe *Tachybaptus rufolavatus*, may not have been restricted to Lake Alaotra (where it no longer occurs); perhaps it occurred elsewhere, and perhaps it still does,' said Roger Safford, Programme & Projects Manager, BirdLife International. The last grebe sighting was in 1988.

Curiously, despite widespread forest clearance across Africa (and Madagascar in particular), it was these two waterbirds, Madagascar Pochard and Alaotra Grebe, that were previously believed to be the only two species that had become extinct anywhere in Africa in the past two decades.

## World Cup puts the boot into Barn Swallows

One swallow might not make a summer but three million certainly make an impressive spectacle. However, a roost of three million wintering Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* in South Africa is being put at risk by preparations for the 2010 World Cup.

The South African Government wants to transform a runway for light aircraft into an international airport on the Mount Moreland Reedbed, 20 km north of Durban. Each evening the swallows swoop into roost in the 250 m<sup>2</sup> area in the province of Kwa-Zulu Natal in eastern South Africa. Their performance is one of the most dramatic wildlife spectacles in the country. Many of the Kwa-Zulu Natal swallows are thought to migrate to Britain and elsewhere in Europe to breed.

Neil Smith, Conservation Division Manager at BirdLife South Africa, said: 'The swallows come here because it is the only suitable roosting site for them in the whole of the region. The area is surrounded by sugar-cane plantations and if it is cleared, these birds could suffer considerable declines. We cannot simply create a new reedbed, [as it] would take too long, even assuming there was a suitable alternative site. And if we did, there would be no guarantee that the swallows would use it, or even find it. There is no room for compromise here, World Cup or not. This site is crucial for swallows and if it is lost, Kwa-Zulu Natal will lose an emblem of the season while one of Britain's most popular birds could also begin to disappear.'

The swallows' roosting site is about the size of four football pitches. In 2007, it will be classified as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by BirdLife International because of its importance to swallows. The reedbed is thought to host more than 8% of the millions of swallows breeding in Europe, from Denmark to Britain to Belarus.

It is also used by Lesser Kestrels *Falco naumanni*, Corn Crakes *Crex crex* and Crowned Hawk-Eagles *Stephanoaetus coronatus*, all of which are threatened species. Mount Moreland lies on the flight path of aircraft that will arrive and depart from the proposed La Mercy airport. BirdLife South Africa fears that the reedbed will be cleared because the birds could threaten aircraft safety.

Barn Swallow populations have already fallen in Britain, probably because of drought and pesticide use on their migration route and the loss of nesting sites in old farm buildings. An environmental impact assessment is under way at La Mercy but BirdLife South Africa suspects that an adverse outcome for the airport's construction will be overturned in favour of potential economic opportunities including new jobs and trade. BirdLife and the RSPB say that the airport proposal should be scrapped and the site turned into a protected area instead to safeguard the swallows it harbours.

Paul Buckley, Head of Global Programmes at the RSPB, said: 'The loss of Mount Moreland, and with it thousands of British swallows, could be felt from Thurrock to Thurso and Sofia to Stockholm. It would be devastating for these birds, which are particularly sensitive to change. Swallows are [among] Britain's favourite birds; they are an icon of spring and the epitome of summer. But developments undertaken without good environmental protection as far away as Kwa-Zulu Natal may trigger their long-term decline right here on our doorsteps.'



## Windhover in a bit of bowver

A long-term decline in breeding success for the Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* has prompted the BTO to add it to its Nest Record Concern List, alongside species such as Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis* and Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*.

Each year the BTO Nest Record Scheme produces a Concern List, incorporating those birds that currently show a significant decline in both breeding success and abundance. The NRS list is intended to act as an early warning system, focusing attention on those birds that may be in greatest need of conservation action in the future. It is sent to the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), the Government's adviser on nature conservation, to help to frame policy. There are currently 21 species on the list, of which Common Kestrel is one of the most recent additions.

While Kestrels used to be a common sight hovering over our motorway verges, numbers declined steeply between the mid 1970s and the mid 1990s, possibly owing to a reduction in suitable hunting habitat related to agricultural intensification. Numbers appear to have stabilised since then, but results of the most recent analysis of Nest Record Scheme data suggest that the species' troubles may not yet be over. Dr David Leech, Research Ecologist at the BTO, said: 'The latest NRS trends indicate that Kestrel brood sizes have declined, with more pairs now rearing three chicks instead of four or even five. This reduction in breeding success is particularly worrying in light of the recent population trends.'

## New recorders

There have been recent changes of Recorder in a number of counties, which are summarised below. You can find a list of all County Recorders on the BB website [www.britishbirds.co.uk/countyrecorders.htm](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk/countyrecorders.htm)

Mark Hawkes has taken over from John Oates as Recorder for Cambridgeshire: Mark Hawkes, 53 Flawn Way, Eynesbury, St Neots, Cambridgeshire PE19 2JT; e-mail [marklhawkes@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:marklhawkes@yahoo.co.uk); tel. 01480 403046 or 07810 622756.

James McCarthy has taken over from Michael Tyler as Recorder for Devon: James McCarthy, 24 Riverdale Orchard, Seaton, Devon EX12 2RG; e-mail [devon-birdrecorder@lycos.com](mailto:devon-birdrecorder@lycos.com)

Mark Newsome has taken over from Geoff Siggins as Recorder for Durham: Mark Newsome, 69 Cedar Drive, Jarrow, Tyne & Wear NE32 4BF; e-mail [mvnewsome@hotmail.com](mailto:mvnewsome@hotmail.com); tel. 0191 536 0168.

Tim Dean has taken over from Ian Fisher as Recorder for Northumberland: Tim Dean, 2 Knocklaw Park, Rothbury, Northumberland NE65 7PW; e-mail [t.r.dean@btinternet.com](mailto:t.r.dean@btinternet.com)

## Cash flows for flagship wetland reserve

The RSPB's flagship reserve-in-waiting in northeast England has received a huge boost from nearly £4m of government funding. Saltholme is 400 ha of wasteland and low-grade farmland on the north bank of the River Tees near Billingham. Its conversion to a mosaic of pools, reedbeds and wet grassland together with construction of a state-of-the-art visitor centre will cost almost £7m before the reserve opens in 2008.

The final pieces of the funding jigsaw came from the regional development agency One North East (£2.3m) and the regional government office that approved £1.4m of European regional development funds. A further £3m had already been raised from landfill credits, trusts and Stockton Council, which acknowledged the tourism and job creation potential of Saltholme by contributing £250,000 to the project.

It's hoped that Saltholme will attract breeding Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus* and possibly Eurasian Bitterns *Botaurus stellaris* as its reedbeds develop and mature. The expectation by the RSPB and its partner the Teesside Environment Trust is that the reserve will attract 100,000 visitors a year, making it one of the largest tourist attractions in the Northeast. At least 23 new jobs will be created at Saltholme and visitors to the site will bring an additional £1.4m per year to the local economy.

## Request for sightings of colour-ringed Tree Sparrows in northwest Norfolk

During the summer and early autumn of 2006, over 80 Tree Sparrows *Passer montanus*, mostly juveniles, were colour-marked at a breeding colony near Thornham, Norfolk. Each bird carries a BTO metal ring on the right leg and a single white colour ring on the left leg. This aspect of the study con-

cerns the dispersal of birds from the breeding area, as we have found that most birds leave the site by mid October or thereabouts. Although most areas of the farm complex are already being covered, we would welcome records of any sightings from adjacent areas such as Holme, Thornham, Titchwell,

Cholesey Barns, Cholesey Farm and Ringstead Downs or even from further afield.

All sightings would be greatly appreciated and will be acknowledged. Please send details to Keith Herber; e-mail [keith.herber@btopenworld.com](mailto:keith.herber@btopenworld.com), tel. (07785) 920044.



## Raven flies off with £20,000 prize

*Raven Black*, the murder mystery by Ann Cleeves, has scooped the world's largest crime-fiction award: the £20,000 Duncan Lawrie Dagger Award of the Crime Writers' Association. The location for Ann's novel is Shetland and it's the first of a quartet that will be set in each of the four seasons on the islands. Since Ann's first thriller, *A Bird in the Hand*, published 20 years ago, she has produced a novel almost every year, many of which are 'birder murders'. *Raven Black* is now out in paperback and her latest thriller, *Hidden Depths*, is imminent. The award judges praised *Raven Black* for its 'superb sense of place – a depiction of an enclosed community with modern and entrenched values constantly competing, [and] a thrilling read.'

## Queen's gamekeeper fined

One of the Queen's gamekeepers has been fined £500 for setting a rat trap that snared a Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* by mistake. Dean Wright, who works on the Sandringham Estate, near King's Lynn, Norfolk, admitted committing the offence at Shernborne in December 2005. The RSPB – whose patron is the Queen – said it was 'disappointing' that the offence had been committed on a royal estate.

Wright, 26, of Anmer, Norfolk, appeared at King's Lynn Magistrates' Court. He had denied causing unnecessary suffering to the owl caught in the trap and the Crown Prosecution Service chose not to pursue that charge. Ian West, head of investigations for the RSPB, said: 'High standards are expected of people working as professional gamekeepers on estates.' Prosecutors said Wright had lawfully set the trap for a rat, but committed an offence by not covering it to prevent birds getting in. The owl had to be put down because of a leg injury it suffered.



Gary Thoburn

24. Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*  
Severn Beach, Avon, December 2006.

## Wrecked Leach's Storm-petrels

Corpses of Leach's Storm-petrels *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* from the recent wreck are being sought for analysis. Steve Votier, from the Marine Biology and Ecology Research Centre of the University of Plymouth, wants to determine whether the Leach's are of European origin, or whether they come from colonies on the North American Atlantic coast. Corpses should be well wrapped in plastic (to prevent leakage en route) and sent to Steve c/o School of Biological Sciences, University of Plymouth, Drake Circus, Plymouth PL4 8AA; contact him at [stephen.votier@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:stephen.votier@plymouth.ac.uk) for further details.

# Rarities Committee news

## New secretary for BBRC

BBRC is seeking to appoint a new secretary from 1st August 2007, to take over the day-to-day administration of the process of assessing national rarities. With BBRC in transition to a fully electronic system, the candidate must be well-organised, self-motivated and able to work well under pressure; and skilled in the development of IT systems, with a good working

knowledge of databases and website maintenance. In addition, we need someone who is discrete, good with people and an excellent communicator, and who has good experience at county or regional records committee level.

A monthly stipend will be offered to the successful candidate; unfortunately, this will be adequate rather than ample!

For more information, contact Colin Bradshaw (tel. 0191 257 2389, e-mail [chair@bbrc.org.uk](mailto:chair@bbrc.org.uk)); applications should be e-mailed to this address by 31st January 2007.



The British Birds Rarities Committee is sponsored by Carl Zeiss Ltd.



# Guidelines for contributors

*British Birds* publishes material dealing with original observations on the birds of the Western Palearctic. Except for records of rarities, papers and notes are normally accepted for publication only on condition that the material is not being offered in whole or in part to any other journal or magazine. Photographs and drawings are welcomed. Referees are used where appropriate, and all submissions are reviewed by the *BB* Editorial Board or Notes Panel.

Papers should be concise and factual, taking full account of previous literature and avoiding repetition as much as possible. Opinions should be based on adequate evidence. Authors are encouraged to submit their work to other ornithologists for critical assessment and comment prior to submission. Such help received should be acknowledged in a separate section. For main papers, an abstract summarising the key results and conclusions should be included, but should not exceed 5% of the total length. Authors should carefully consult this issue for style of presentation, especially of references and tables.

English and scientific names and sequence of birds should follow The '*British Birds*' List of Birds of the Western Palearctic (1997), with amendments as detailed in *Brit. Birds* 97: 2-5 and listed on the *BB* website at: [www.britishbirds.co.uk/bblast.htm](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk/bblast.htm) or, for non-West Palearctic species, Dickinson (2003), *The Howard and Moore Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World*. Names of plants should follow Stace (1999), *Field Flora of the British Isles*. Names of mammals should follow Corbet & Harris (1991), *The Handbook of British Mammals*, 3rd edition. Topographical (plumage and structure) and ageing terminology should follow editorial recommendations (*Brit. Birds* 74: 239-242; 78: 419-427; 80: 502).

Contributions should be submitted on disk or (preferably) by e-mail, to the Editor. Most word-processing applications are suitable, but, if you are not using an up-to-date, standard program, it is best to submit two versions, one in the original word-processed format and one in a basic text format such as RTF (Rich Text Format). For contributors without access to a computer, text should be submitted in

duplicate, typewritten, with double spacing and wide margins, and on one side of the paper only.

Hand-drawn figures should be in black ink on good-quality tracing paper or white drawing paper; lettering should be inserted lightly in pencil, while captions should be typed separately. Please discuss computer-generated maps and figures with the Editor before submitting them.

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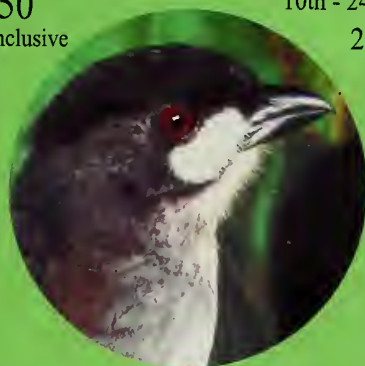
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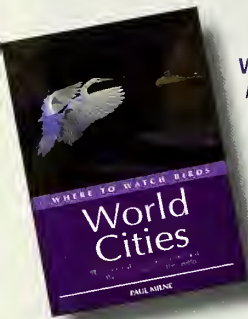
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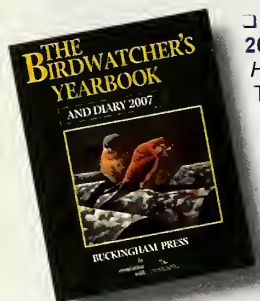
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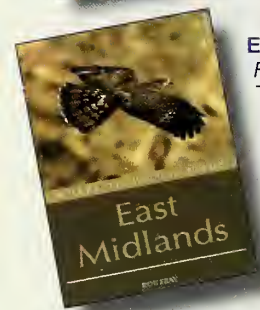
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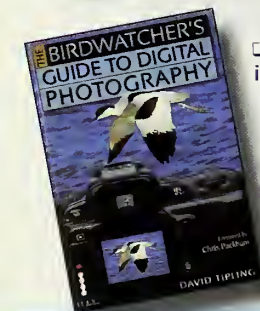
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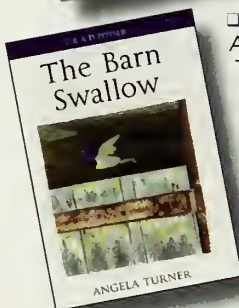
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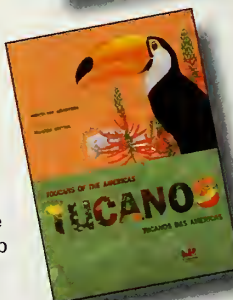
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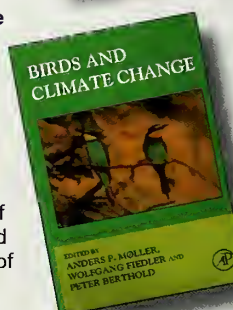
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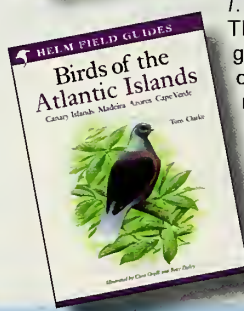
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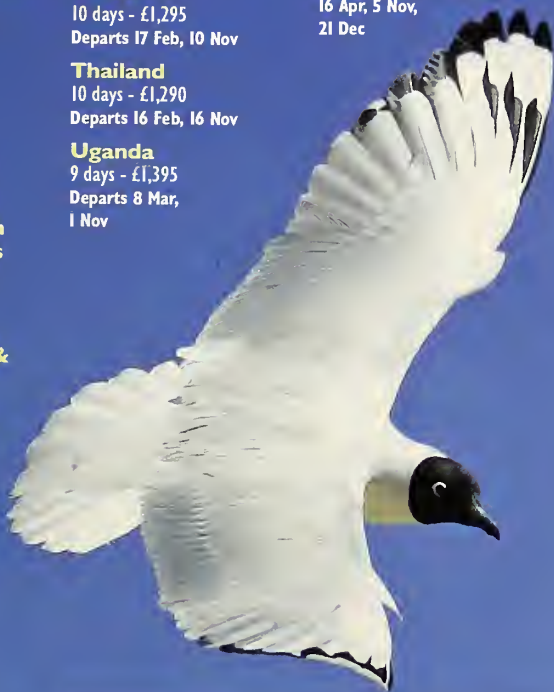
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*Shetland Islands, June 2006.*



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# Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2005

## Part 2: passerines

*P.A. Fraser, M.J. Rogers and the Rarities Committee*

This is the second part of the 2005 BBRC annual report, which covers passerine species. For non-passerines, and the introduction to the report, see Part 1 on pp. 16–61.

### Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* (3, 485, 23)

Cornwall Sennen, 27th May (M. T. Elliott, P. G. Hibbert *et al.*) (fig. 1).

Dorset Christchurch, 30th April (L. Chappell). Portland Bill, three, 27th May, photo (G. Walbridge *et al.*).

Hampshire Farlington Marshes, 10th May (J. Crook). Keyhaven, 10th October (T. Parminter).

Lincolnshire Gibraltar Point, 1st May (N. P. Senior).

Norfolk Overstrand, 23rd May (G. Dormer).

Northeast Scotland Crimond, Loch of Strathbeg, 28th June, photo (H. E. Maggs *et al.*).

Scilly St Mary's, 18th–19th May, photo (W. H. Wagstaff *et al.*).

Shetland Whalsay, 4th June (B. Marshall *et al.*). Fair Isle, 5th–6th June (D. Coutts, J. D. Okill *et al.*).

Suffolk Covehithe, 1st October (B. J. Small).

Sussex Beachy Head, 30th May (D. & J. F. Cooper).

Wiltshire Corsham Lake, 25th April (J. C. Rolls *et al.*).

Yorkshire, East Spurn, 27th April (P. Collins, B. R. Spence, S. D. Waite); 1st May (S. D. Waite *et al.*); 20th May (P. Collins, S. D. Waite); 22nd May (M. Daveston, S. Johnson *et al.*); 28th May (A. A. Hutt, G. Taylor). Kilnsea & Spurn, 2nd May (R. J. Swales). Blacktoft Sands, 4th May (M. J. Pilsworth, R. Seaton *et al.*).

2003 Kent Capel Le Ferne, 6th May (D. A. Gibson); 27th May (D. A. Gibson, I. A. Roberts).

2003 Scilly St Mary's, 8th August (E. A. Fisher, R. L. Flood).

2004 Kent St Margaret's, 17th June (I. P. Hodgson).

First described by Temminck in 1835 from Egypt, this handsome if slightly sluggish swallow is only just 100 years old as a British bird. All that *The Handbook* could muster in 1938 was an arrival of three to Fair Isle, Shetland, on 2nd June 1906 (now thought more likely to have referred to just one bird) and an individual recorded by Michael Nicoll at Walland Marsh, Sussex, on 16th May 1909. Although Nicoll was trusted by Witherby, his bird fell to the reaper blades of later *BB* editors, who expunged it from the British List with the other 'Hastings Rarities' in 1962 (Nicholson & Ferguson-Lees 1962). It was not until 1931 that the next acceptable bird was found, again on Fair Isle, on 19th June.

After the war, wider observations produced the first inland record, in Hertfordshire in June 1949, and the first indication of future broad-front overshoots in early spring 1952, with single birds in Ireland (Co. Wexford), on Lundy, Devon, and at Cley, Norfolk, dated between 6th March and 10th April. The last of these was one of the first rarities filmed in colour by the Gresham's schoolmaster Dick Bagnall-Oakley; bird-club audiences went green with envy the following winter. After another stutter, annual spring discoveries began in 1964. For once, the engine behind the increase was obvious. Before any hint of global warming, the community in southern Iberia had spread north from the 1950s and bred successfully in southern France in 1963. Furthermore, the marked expansion of the species' western community was matched by a similar event in former Yugoslavia from the 1950s and



followed by northward spreads in Italy and Bulgaria and into Romania from 1975 onwards.

Autumn occurrences did not begin until 1959 and did not become annual until after 1983. Remarkably, they soon showed a very late peak, in the second half of October, and an extended reach up through eastern England as far north as Shetland, and this span provided 60% of autumn records up to 1996. This new phenomenon was particularly obvious in 1987: after 11 in spring, there were at least 52, maybe 60, in autumn, in 16 counties of all three countries. A Scilly swarm included a party of seven on St Mary's on 27th October and overall the 1987 influx has yet to be matched.

Earlier commentators have all linked the spring overshoots to adventurous Portuguese and Spanish birds but the autumn surges are harder to explain. The main exodus from Spain occurs in September and early October and seemingly even earlier over the eastern Mediterranean. With the winter quarters of European birds virtually unknown, their standard direction(s) cannot be drawn except for a marked north-south passage at Gibraltar. Vinicombe & Cottridge (1996) noted the association of the 1987 autumn influx with a period of southerly winds. The same vector delivered six Short-toed Larks *Calandrella brachydactyla* and an Alpine Swift *Apus melba* but less cohesively 95 other passerine rarities of mainly eastern origins including 48 Pallas's Leaf Warblers *Phylloscopus proregulus*. A northerly drift was hardly proved. Even more puzzling have been three English and one Irish bird in the Februarys of 1998 and 2004. Although regarded as unprecedented, they may have been individuals that had simply not migrated south, like the Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* that winter aberrantly in Spain and northwest Africa, and then matched the occasional early returns of their relatives.

In Europe, Red-rumped Swallow has become an annual vagrant in The Netherlands and Sweden and almost so in Austria. It also reaches Ireland, Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Poland (among a total of 15 recording countries north of its breeding limits); lost waifs have even straggled to Madeira and the Azores.

The only identification caveat applied to Red-rumped Swallow concerns the occasional hybrid Barn Swallow × House Martin *Delichon urbicum*. The Nearctic Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota* is not dissimilar in plumage pattern but has a square tail without streamers. The recent (2000–04) rejection rate has been 4%.

Nicholson, E.M., & Ferguson-Lees, J. 1962. The Hastings Rarities. *Brit. Birds* 55: 299–384.

(Widespread and locally common in NW Africa, Iberia, Balkans and Greece but uncommon in C Mediterranean. To E, breeds discontinuously in W and S Turkey and Middle East. Wintering area of European population unknown but assumed to lie in N equatorial Africa. Other populations breed in E Asia from S Siberia to S China and Japan, Indian subcontinent and locally in equatorial Africa.)

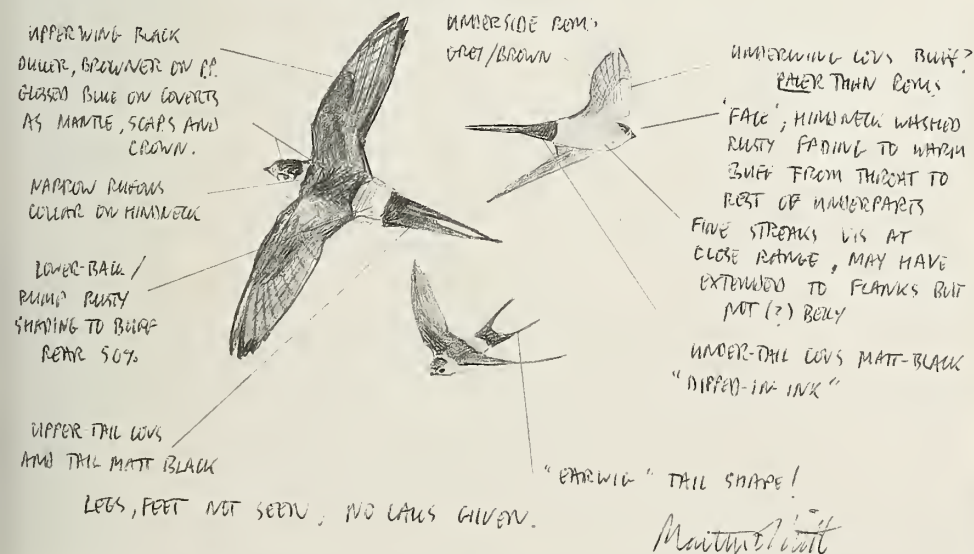


Fig. 1. Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*, Sennen, Cornwall, May 2005.

Martin Elliott

### Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii* (1, 12, 1)

Scilly St Mary's, first-winter, 23rd October, photo (P. J. Freestone, M. Halliday, R. Walsh *et al.*).

(Breeds from S Transbaikalia and N Mongolia to extreme NE China and S to Tibet. Winters locally throughout Indian subcontinent S to Sri Lanka.)

### Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* (1, 274, 8)

Fife Isle of May, 16th October, trapped, photo (D. A. & J. Bell, A. J. Gramauskas). Wormiston, 25th October (K. D. Shaw).

Outer Hebrides Ness, Lewis, 5th November (A. Robinson, M. S. Scott *et al.*).

Shetland Fair Isle, 25th September, photo (D. N. Shaw *et al.*); 13th October (P. A. A. Baxter); 23rd October (D. N. Shaw). Sumburgh, Mainland, 26th October to 22nd November (P. V. Harvey *et al.*).

Suffolk Thorpeness, 16th–20th October (E. W. Patrick, R. F. Tomlinson *et al.*).

2004 Scilly St Mary's, 25th October (R. A. Filby, N. Lawrence, R. A. Parkes).

(European range restricted to N Urals. Widespread across C and E Siberia to N China, Kamchatka, Kuril Islands and Japan. Winters widely across S China, Taiwan and throughout N and C parts of SE Asia. Population in Himalayas and mountains of west-central China winters throughout Indian subcontinent.)

### Pechora Pipit *Anthus gustavi* (5, 65, 2)

Orkney North Ronaldsay, 25th September (A. E. Duncan *et al.*).

Shetland Scatness, Mainland, 25th September, photo (P. V. Harvey, R. Riddington *et al.*).

1975 Suffolk Minsmere, 27th April (*Brit. Birds* 69: 352); no longer considered acceptable.

(Breeds within narrow region of scrub-tundra and taiga of subarctic Eurasia, from Pechora region of NE Russia across Siberia to Chukotskiy Peninsula and Kamchatka. Migrates through E China and Taiwan to wintering areas in Philippines, N Borneo and N Sulawesi. Isolated population breeds in NE China.)

### Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* (13, 412, 11)

Caernarfonshire Bardsey, 16th–21st October (E. Bowler, A. George, S. D. Stansfield).

Dorset St Aldhelm's Head, 5th October (P. Combridge). Portland Bill, 6th October (N. Hopper, J. A. Lidster, G. Walbridge *et al.*).

Norfolk Burnham Overy, 4th October (M. A. Golley *et al.*).



Ian Butler

25. Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*, St Mary's, Scilly, October 2005.



Northumberland Farne Islands, 5th–12th October, photo (D. Steele *et al.*).

Scilly St Mary's, 9th October (M. I. Hoit, P. Holness, K. Langdon); same, 12th–14th October, photo (A. Bridges *et al.*) (plate 25); 25th October (O. Campbell, P. Dolton, E. Palmer *et al.*). Tresco, 26th October (A. W. Mason, P. A. Stancliffe); same, 30th October (R. L. Flood, A. Hannington). St Agnes, 2nd November (D. Murdoch).

Yorkshire, East Sammy's Point, Easington, 10th September (A. J. & M. G. Stoye). Kilnsea, 11th September (J. M. Bayldon).

2002 Devon Dawlish Warren, 14th October (I. W. Lakin).

Described by Pallas from Siberia in 1811, the Red-throated Pipit was first confirmed in Britain in Shetland, on Fair Isle on 2nd October 1908, and the second was 'heard' there on 1st November of the same year. The third was 'seen and heard' on St Kilda, Western Isles, on 21st September 1910. A further 13 were found in the Northern and Western Isles in the period of collection and by George Waterston in his early Fair Isle days in the 1930s. The first accepted record for England did not come until one at Dungeness, Kent, on 5th September 1938.

Since a distinctive, thin, hissed, long-drawn-out and fading call has been so much stressed by BBRC as the fundament of a secure claim, we might assume that it was the note that the ancients heard. In fact, they perceived two: the modern *sine qua non* and what Bernard Tucker described as a 'full, musical, rather abrupt chiiip'. Furthermore, *The Handbook* text implied that the latter note was the commoner utterance (and it was certainly given frequently by wintering birds in Kenya in the 1952/53 winter; pers. obs.). Also rendered as 'tsup' and 'stuh' by Fennoscandian ears, its rarity in the modern British discussion of pipit calls is odd.

There were no finds between 1939 and 1949 but from 1950, the bird observatories made new discoveries. By 1972, there had been 55 and autumn occurrences had become annual, making up about two-thirds of all records. By 1985, the total had grown to 163 and there were noticeable flurries in spring and autumn during the early 'three great years' for rarities, 1975 to 1977; the first produced a record 17 birds. Yet although spring overshoots became annual, gaps still showed in the autumn series, with none in 1982 and 1983. Accordingly, the seasonal divide changed, with more (43%) in spring; and the northern bias faded, with greater numbers of Scilly observers making the archipelago the *locus classicus* in autumn (34% cf. 22% on Shetland). Overall, there was no sign that the bird had become truly commoner; the new occurrence pattern was much more an artefact of increased observer effort and exploration.

Two decades on, by 2005, the modern total (since 1950) had increased to 423 with a doubling of the annual average and the spring share up to 47% (with 106 birds making May the best month of the year). The Northern Isles regained a small lead in locality shares (22%); the Scilly and southwest share slumped (from 34% to 20%). More intriguingly, there were 13 inland finds, almost doubling the total of such records. Remarkably, the former Barn Elms Reservoirs and Beddington Sewage-farm, Greater London, provided three and two birds respectively. In 1992, there was an extraordinary influx, with 34 of 47 birds dated from May to July (12 of them were in Shetland, where a male sang on Fetlar for three weeks in June). Ominously, since 2001 the bird has seemingly struggled to reach us. The recent average of seven a year represents a 60% decrease on the previous decade and is the same as that from 1950 to 1985. Astonishingly, there was no spring bird in 2005.

Within Britain, autumn birds appear to move south at a leisurely pace; the gap between the Shetland mean date (27 recent birds) of 27th September and that for Scilly (46 individuals) of 16th October is 19 days. Spring birds are seemingly more urgent in their passage, judged by an analysis of records from 1958 to 1986. Apart from nine that came early to southwest localities on a mean date of 29th April, the main contingent represented by 31 in north Norfolk appeared on a mean date of 19th May, only three days ahead of that of 22 birds in Shetland.

Vinicombe & Cottridge (1996) offered no neat explanation for the vagrancy of the Red-throated Pipit. Breeding essentially above the Arctic Circle, its nearest and stable Fennoscandian community numbers about 16,500 pairs. In common with their eastern relatives, most fly to the Tropics for the winter. Whether or not there is a migratory divide is not known but some birds from the westernmost population move due south and, before or after crossing the Mediterranean, must shift up to 30°W to winter in West Africa, including Gambia. Against this backdrop, it is likely that our autumn birds are either drifted migrants from the contingent that departs from south Sweden or fellow-travellers within



the hordes of sympatric Meadow Pipits *A. pratensis* that move southwest. The spring vector remains puzzling. Perhaps birds trekking north from West Africa just stay on that tack and do not turn east until they reach the North Sea.

In many European countries, the Red-throated Pipit is not regarded as a rarity, but a few have strayed to Bear Island, Iceland and the Faeroes in an extension of their regular achievement of Britain and Ireland.

The field identification of the Red-throated Pipit has attracted much debate. Well seen, adults present no problems but notoriously some unsullied first-winter birds can resemble either Pechora Pipit *A. gustavi* or Meadow Pipit. Setting a nasty trap, a few first-winter Meadows are as heavily spotted below as Red-throats, and some 'orange-breasted' spring Meadow Pipits are a further pitfall (Porter 2005). The recent (2000–04) rejection rate has been 3%.

Porter, R. 2005. 'Orange-breasted' Meadow Pipits – an identification pitfall. *Birding World* 18: 169–172.

(Breeds in Arctic Eurasia, from N Norway, Sweden and Finland E to Chukotskiy Peninsula and S to Kamchatka, with small numbers in W Alaska. Winters across N and C equatorial Africa, S China and SE Asia.)

### Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens* (1, 3, 1)

Lincolnshire Wyberton, 5th–13th December, photo (P. R. French *et al.*) (plate 26), also seen 24th–29th January 2006.

This represents only the fifth record of Buff-bellied Pipit for Britain. All four previous records have been on islands, with one on St Kilda, Western Isles, one on Fair Isle, Shetland, and two on Scilly. Remarkably, this first for the mainland was found wintering on the east coast! Vagrant birds inevitably invite careful scrutiny at a level which sometimes produces fresh insights into their identification. This was certainly the case with this individual. Paul French is to be especially commended for the bird's discovery and persevering to secure its identity even though the obvious grey nape and grey cast to the upperparts were initially viewed as anomalous and the underparts streaking rather extensive. Further

investigation indicated the features to be within normal variation for this species and the 1996 Scilly bird appears to have been somewhat similar in its upperparts plumage.

The greater coverts of the Lincolnshire bird were also instructive; with clearly defined, extensive dark centres with pointed tips and rather narrow pale fringes, these appear to be at the more obvious end of retained juvenile feathers. Adult greater coverts tend to have more



26. Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens*, Wyberton, Lincolnshire, December 2005.

diffuse, squared-off dark centres and fringes which are richer buff, and also broader, especially at the tips. Consequently, this bird can be aged as a first-winter.

The possibility of this individual belonging to the Asian subspecies of Buff-bellied Pipit *A. r. japonicus* was seriously considered, given the circumstances of this record. In winter plumage, this form typically appears quite different in a number of ways from *rubescens*; however, some can overlap in some characters, particularly those which undergo a partial pre-breeding moult early in the New Year, and the plumage of these two forms becomes progressively more similar. Subtle features such as the browner underparts streaking, duller and buffer fringes to coverts and dark legs all indicate *rubescens* for the Lincolnshire bird.

The occurrence of this, and another Buff-bellied Pipit earlier in the autumn in Halsingland, Sweden, suggests the possibility that at least some Buff-bellied Pipits may come 'over the top' from

Greenland/northeast Canada, perhaps with migrating Meadow Pipits *A. pratensis* from east Greenland and Iceland, to end up in western Europe in autumn and winter. With an increasing number of records in Iceland in recent years, perhaps optimistic birders should look for more Buff-bellied Pipits anywhere with suitable habitat where Meadow Pipits pass through and might winter. Learning to listen for that (with practice) rather distinctive double 'pip-it' call may help in locating more of what is surely an overlooked vagrant and a true 'birder's bird'.

(Breeds W Greenland, N and NW Canada, and Alaska. Winters W and S USA, Mexico and C America. Asian race *japonicus* vagrant to W Palearctic, breeds NE Siberia W to Baikal region; winters N Pakistan and NW India to S and E China, S Korea and S Japan.)

### Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

#### SE European and W Asian race *M. f. feldegg*, 'Black-headed Wagtail' (0, 11, 1)

Devon West Charleton Marsh, Kingsbridge Estuary, ♂, 8th–18th June, photo (A. Williams *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 281); same, South Huish, 8th July to 2nd September, photo (A. J. Livett *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 99: plate 351).

2003 Scilly St Mary's, first-summer ♂, 6th May (E. A. Fisher, R. L. Flood *et al.*).

2004 Lincolnshire Holbeach Marsh, ♂, 4th June (J. J. Gilroy).

These records represent a significant upturn in the occurrence of this form, constituting 25% of the total number ever recorded. The number of accepted records dropped in the mid 1990s following a protracted review after the publication of van den Berg & Oreel (1985), a paper which highlighted the potential pitfall of very dark-headed *M. f. thunbergi* and led to a requirement for breeding-plumage males to show a jet-black hood to enable acceptance. The Scilly record above has shown that this is not an absolute requirement, as it is not necessarily a feature of first-summer or early spring males. One critical feature of both the Scilly and the Devon birds was the presence of green feathering in the nape; this is not a characteristic of *thunbergi*, in which dark-headed males will always retain bluish-grey tones in the nape, but is a key feature of fresh *feldegg*. To ensure acceptance, it remains critical that individuals do not show evidence of features that may indicate intergradation with another form. The photographed bird in Lincolnshire, although observed only briefly, did not appear to show any features at variance with pure *feldegg*. The Devon bird now holds the record of the longest-staying individual in the UK, bringing to mind the bird that spent over a month in Oxfordshire in 1988.

van den Berg, M., & Oreel, G. J. 1985. Field identification of black-headed Yellow Wagtails in Western Europe. *Brit Birds* 78: 176–183.

(Breeds Balkans and Greece E through Turkey to E Kazakhstan and Afghanistan, and S to Iran. Western populations winter Nigeria to Uganda and S to Congo, eastern populations winter NW India.)

### Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* (0, 174, 4)

Norfolk Cley, first-winter, 22nd August, photo (P. R. Colston *et al.*).

Northumberland Alnmouth, first-winter, 10th–11th September, photo (S. J. McElwee, J. G. Steele, A. Tilmouth *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 401).

Scilly Bryher, ♂, 30th April, photo (P. Davies, D. B. Rosair *et al.*).

Shetland Fair Isle, 29th April to 2nd May, photo (D. N. Shaw, M. D. Warren *et al.*).

1990 Kent Sandwich Bay, 8th–10th May, photo (K. B. Ellis, N. J. Hallam, S. Pearce *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 91: 517); previously found unacceptable, now accepted after review.

(Nominate race breeds in N Russia, from E Kola and Kanin Peninsula across N Siberia to Taimyr Peninsula and S to C Siberia. To south, range expanded W during 20th century; small numbers now breed regularly in Belarus, Baltic countries and occasionally S Finland; otherwise from Ukraine and S Russia, E across Kazakhstan and Mongolia to N China. Black-backed race *calcarata* breeds S Central Asia to Tibetan Plateau. Winters throughout Indian subcontinent, S China and SE Asia to peninsular Thailand.)

### Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia* (1, 155, 3)

Norfolk Holme, first-winter ♂, 7th October, trapped, photo (J. Andrews, S. Barker, A. Powell *et al.*).

Shetland Fair Isle, first-winter, 5th–6th September, photo (R. J. Butcher *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 350). Norwick, Unst, 6th September (M. G. Pennington).

2004 Shetland Sumburgh Head, Mainland, 25th August (S. E. Duffield, P. M. Ellis, H. Moncrieff *et al.*).



(Widespread throughout E Europe with dramatic population increase in 20th century. Range still expanding NW into W Norway, and locally abundant in S Scandinavia and Baltic countries. C European range from Denmark SE to Romania and Ukraine, and through temperate European Russia to S Siberia. Winters E Africa, from S Kenya to Zimbabwe.)

### Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope* (0, 4, 1)

Shetland Fair Isle, first-winter ♀, 23rd–27th October, trapped, photo (M. Culshaw, E. Douglas *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 99: plate 24; plate 27).

This is the fifth record for Britain and the third for the magic isle. All have arrived in a 16-day period from 9th to 25th October and, apart from one in Dorset on 19th October 1997, all have been in Shetland. A report of an immature male on the MSV *Fennica* about 175 km east of Aberdeen on 12th

October has not yet been submitted. It is worth reiterating that records at sea within the UK Economic Exclusion Zone of 200 nautical miles (370 km) or the midpoint between the UK and any neighbouring country (if shorter) are considered by BBRC (*Brit. Birds* 85: 332).

(Breeds throughout Siberia from Ob River E to Anadyr and Kamchatka, with small numbers to European foothills of Urals in W. S limit reaches N Mongolia, Ussuriland, NE Hokkaido and NE China, with isolated population on E slopes of Tibetan Plateau. Winters from Nepal E through Himalayan foothills to NE India, Burma and N Indochina to C Thailand, S China and Taiwan.)



Rebecca Nason

27. First-winter female Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope*, Fair Isle, Shetland, October 2005.

### Rufous-tailed Robin *Luscinia sibilans* (0, 1, 0)

2004 Shetland Fair Isle, first-winter, 23rd October, trapped, photo (D. N. Shaw, M. Wood *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 97: plate 390; 99: plates 111–114).

This was the first record for the Western Palearctic and surely one of the highlights of 2004. Unfortunately, it was enjoyed by just 20 or so observers, and had departed by the following morning. This species shares a similar range and migratory route with its close congener the Siberian Blue Robin *L. cyane*, breeding as far west as the lower Yenisey valley and wintering in southern China and south-east Asia, so its occurrence here was not altogether unexpected. It arrived just one week after another spectacular, if completely unpredicted, eastern vagrant – a Chestnut-eared Bunting *Emberiza fucata*, which was recently accepted onto Category A of the British List by BOURC – what a fantastic double for Fair Isle (Shaw in press)! It is interesting to speculate why northwest Europe has received a flurry of extreme far-eastern vagrants in recent years. In addition to these two, there have been several Siberian Rubythroats *L. calliope*, Siberian Blue Robins and Thick-billed Warblers *Acrocephalus aedon*, and two Eastern Crowned Warblers *Phylloscopus coronatus*. And of course, the second European record of Rufous-tailed Robin occurred just over a year later, in Poland (Shaw 2006). Whatever the reason, long may it continue!

Shaw, D. N. 2006. Rufous-tailed Robin on Fair Isle: new to Britain. *Brit. Birds* 99: 236–241.  
—, In press. Chestnut-eared Bunting on Fair Isle: new to Britain. *Brit. Birds*.

(Breeds S Siberia from N Sakhalin and Russian Maritime provinces bordering S Sea of Okhotsk, W to Altai Mountains and upper Yenisey River, N to 62°N in Yakutia, and south to mountains in NE China. Winters China south of Yangtze River, to N Indochina and Thailand.)



## Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus* (2, 32, 2)

Devon Lundy, first-winter, 14th October, trapped, photo (R. Castle, L. James *et al.*). Berry Head, first-winter, 18th–19th, 27th October (H. Vaughan *et al.*).

In northwest Russia this remains a scarce and generally elusive species, yet it managed to spread to Finland in the 1940s, although the fluctuating population there has always been low, with an average of less than ten breeding pairs found annually (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). The persistence of the Finnish population at these low levels may suggest that others go undetected and that perhaps the species is more widespread than thought. The westward expansion failed to progress beyond Finland, there being few records elsewhere in the Baltic States; for example, the only Estonian records are of a male in May 1977 and, subsequently, a pair in the same location in 1980 when a brood was observed in late June (Leibak *et al.* 1994). Nominate *cyanurus* ranges right across Asia to Kamchatka and Japan and, though scarce and patchily distributed in European Russia, it occurs in much greater densities farther east, with 120 singing males in 100 km of favourable habitat in Ural Mountain forests (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

Some British birders will fondly recall encounters with the slightly brighter Central Asian race *rufilatus* from such places as Nainital in India (though birds in the western Himalayas are sometimes separated as *pallidior*), but this race is essentially sedentary, and British birds originate from the coniferous forests of northern Eurasia, within the breeding range of *cyanurus*.

As befits an eastern vagrant, there is a marked east-coast bias to records; for example, despite saturation coverage there is still no record from Scilly and there is still just one Cornish record (Rame Head, October 1999). Autumn records range from 16th September (Fair Isle, Shetland, 1993) to 16th November (Gibraltar Point, Lincolnshire, 2002), but for those intent on finding their own it is notable that 12 of the last 20 records have been discovered between 11th and 22nd October.

Ageing and sexing is not always as straightforward as a quick glance at a field guide might suggest. Clear evidence of steely blue on the upperparts, often admixed with brown, points to an adult male, but females and first-winters need a more critical approach, even in the hand. A moult contrast within the greater coverts and pale tips to these feathers point to a first-winter, as does a pinkish/yellow inside to the upper mandible (dark brown-grey in adults; BWP). A first-winter with some bluish tones on the lesser coverts and scapulars will be a male; though Alström *et al.* 1991 suggested that females can also show blue tones to these feathers.

This species remains one of the most sought-after of rarities, and though Red-flanked Bluetails have lost the enigmatic rarity appeal of the closely related Siberian Rubythroat, it is doubtful that British birders will ever tire of them.

Hagemeijer, W. J. M., & Blair, M. J. (eds.) 1997. *The EBCC Atlas of European Breeding Birds: their distribution and abundance*. Poyser, London.

Leibak, E., Lillileht, V., & Veromann, H. 1994. *Birds of Estonia: status, distribution and numbers*. Estonian Ornithological Society, Tallinn.

(Small population persists in NE Finland but main range in cool temperate forests of N Eurasia from E Russia and Siberia to Kamchatka, N Japan and NE China. Winters S China, Taiwan and S Japan, through SE Asia to N peninsular Thailand.)

## Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus*

### Eastern race *S. t. maurus*, 'Siberian Stonechat' (1, 315, 3)

Cornwall Porthgwarra, 6th–14th October, photo (per [www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)).

Dorset Wick Hams, 24th October (L. Chappell).

Durham Whitburn, first-winter, 19th–21st October (D. M. Foster, B. Unwin *et al.*).

2003 Norfolk Titchwell, first-winter ♂, 24th–27th October (*Brit. Birds* 97: 596); note revised dates.

2004 Cleveland South Gare, ♂, 20th October (I. J. Foster, R. C. Taylor). In addition, note amendment to South Gare ♀/first-winter published in last report (*Brit. Birds* 98: 672); correct dates are 24th October to 2nd November.

(Breeds widely across N Asia from N Urals S to N Caspian Sea, Mongolia and N China, E to Kolyma basin, Okhotsk coast and N Japan. Winters from N Indian subcontinent to S China and SE Asia.)

Stef McElwee



28. Female Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*, Holy Island, Northumberland, November 2005.

### Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* (1, 20, 1)

Suffolk Landguard Point, 4th October, photo (D. Langlois, N. Odin *et al.*).

(Small European population restricted to E Greece, Bulgaria, Ukraine and SW Russia. In Asia, breeds widely across arid grasslands from Turkey through Kazakhstan, Mongolia and N China, S to Iran and N Pakistan. Winters from N Sahel zone to E Africa, and throughout Middle East from Arabian Peninsula to S Iran, Pakistan and NW India.)

### Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* (9, 79, 7)

Cleveland South Gare, ♂, 29th November, photo (C. V. Greenley, B. Taylor *et al.*).

Hampshire Hayling Island, ♂, 13th November, photo (A. C. Johnson, S. K. Woolley *et al.*).

Kent Herne Bay, first-winter ♀, 19th–21st November, photo (T. N. Hodge, B. J. Matlock *et al.*).

Leysdown, Sheppey, ♀, 5th December (A. M. Woodcock).

Norfolk Eccles-on-Sea, ♀, 1st–4th November, photo (N. Bowman *et al.*). Caister, first-winter ♂, 19th–22nd November, photo (A. & J. M. Grieve *et al.*).

Northumberland Holy Island, ♀, 31st October to 4th November, photo (P. R. Massey *et al.*) (plate 28).

2004 Kent Walpole Bay, Margate, 3rd November (S. D. W. Mount, F. Solly).

(Breeds widely but discontinuously across arid and desert regions of N Africa from Morocco to Middle East, N to S Caucasus, and across C Asia from C Iran and N Pakistan to Mongolia and N China. Some N African birds resident, but many winter in Sahara and Sahel region of N Africa from Mauritania E to Ethiopia and Somalia. Asian breeders winter from Arabian Peninsula to NW India.)

### White's Thrush *Zoothera dauma* (27, 37, 1)

Shetland Wester Quarff, Mainland, 28th April (P. V. Harvey, D. Playfair, R. Riddington *et al.*).

This is the first spring record since one seen briefly at Weaversham, Cheshire, on 7th May 1964, although one was on Copeland, Co. Down, on 16th–20th April 1993. The only other British records in spring were in Cleveland in 1870 and Cornwall in March 1903. Two seen together in Northumberland on 26th April 1952 were rejected in the BBRC's recent review of 1950–57 records (Wallace *et al.* 2006). It is perhaps no coincidence that the 2005 record should follow a record autumn for the species and surely it signifies an individual that has overwintered successfully in western Europe rather than a spring vagrant from the east. Until relatively recently there seemed to be a widespread belief that all spring Siberian vagrants were escaped cagebirds. There is now, however, a strong body of evidence that suggests that many 'eastern' vagrants occur naturally in spring, either after overwintering successfully in western Europe, or, indeed, as genuine spring overshoots.



Wallace, D. I. M., Bradshaw, C., & Rogers, M. J. 2006. A review of the 1950–57 British rarities. *Brit. Birds* 99: 460–464.

(Palearctic race *aurea* widespread in C and S Siberia from Yenisey River to Ussuriland, S to N Mongolia, extreme NE China, Korean Peninsula and Japan. Small (isolated?) population extends W to foothills of European Urals. Winters widely throughout S China, Taiwan and S Japan to Indochina and C Thailand. Nominate race resident or altitudinal migrant in Himalayas, SW China and Taiwan.)

## Grey-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus* (0, 45, 1)



Stef McElwee

29. Grey-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus*, Northaw Great Wood, Hertfordshire, November 2005.

Hertfordshire Northaw Great Wood, 13th–25th November, photo (R. Callf *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 99: plate 25; plate 29).

(Breeds extreme NE Siberia E throughout Alaska and N Canada to Labrador and Newfoundland. Migrates across E USA to winter in N South America.)

## Veery *Catharus fuscescens* (0, 6, 1)

Shetland Northdale, Unst, first-winter, 22nd September, trapped, photo (J. Fairclough, R. Lockwood, G. Woodburn *et al.*), later killed by cat (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 402).

Only the seventh record for Britain and the first for Shetland; sadly, this bird met a sorry end. This is the earliest British record, the previous earliest being that on North Ronaldsay, Orkney, on 30th September 2002.

(Breeds Canada from S British Columbia, E to Newfoundland, S through warm temperate USA, E of Rocky Mountains and S to N Arizona and Georgia. Winters N South America from Colombia to NW Brazil.)

## Dark-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis* (2, 52, 5)

Gower Townhill, Swansea, ♂ *T. r. atrogularis*, 29th December to 15th March 2006, photo (A. & W. Woodward *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 99: plates 75 & 76).

Shetland Geosetter, Mainland, first-winter ♀ *T. r. atrogularis*, 4th October, photo (H. R. Harrop *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 403; plate 30). Fair Isle, first-winter ♀ *T. r. atrogularis*, 21st–22nd October, photo (M. D. Warren *et al.*); ♂ *T. r. atrogularis*, 23rd–24th October, photo (R. J. Butcher, D. N. Shaw *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 99: plate 26).

Somerset Curload, ♂ *T. r. atrogularis*, 24th December to 3rd January 2006 (R. Billington *et al.*).

(Western, black-throated form *atrogularis* breeds in C and N Urals, E across SW Siberia and E Kazakhstan, to NW China. Winters Iraq to N India, E through Himalayan foothills to Bhutan. Nominate red-throated form breeds to E in C Siberia, wintering in E Himalayas and S fringe of Tibetan Plateau from Nepal to SW China, and N to NE China.)





30. First-winter female Black-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis atragularis*, Geosetter, Mainland Shetland, October 2005. We include the entire description here as an example of the sort of informative and instructive composite that birders equipped with a decent camera are now producing. *Hugh Harrop*

## American Robin *Turdus migratorius* (0, 22, 0)

2004 Lincolnshire Grimsby, first-winter ♀, 1st January to 8th March (T. Moore, S. Smith *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: 675); note corrected observer details.

(Breeds throughout North America from tree line of Alaska and N Canada, S to S Mexico. Winters from S Canada to S USA and C America, S to Guatemala.)

**Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella certhiola* (1, 31, 0)**

2004 Shetland Pool of Virkie, Mainland, 6th–7th October (D. & J. J. Gilroy *et al.*).

(Northern race *rubescens* breeds across C and E Siberia, N to 64°N, from Irtysh River E to Yakutia and Sea of Okhotsk. Four other races breed to the S, from NE Kazakhstan through Mongolia to Ussuriland and N and NE China. Winters from NE India to S China, and S throughout SE Asia.)

**Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata* (7, 97, 4)**

Shetland Foula, first-winter, 5th–6th September, trapped, photo (A. R. Mainwood, B. H. Thomason) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 404). Out Skerries, 5th–6th October, photo (P. Forrest, M. J. McKee, T. Warrick *et al.*). Fair Isle, 13th–14th October, trapped, photo (M. D. Warren *et al.*); 17th October (S. J. Aspinall, M. Culshaw, P. A. Harris *et al.*).

(Singing males regular in E Finland. To E, breeds discontinuously from C Urals E across much of Siberia to Kamchatka, Kuril Islands, Hokkaido and NE China. Winters in Indian subcontinent, from Nepal E through NE India into SE Asia and Philippines.)

**Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* (many, 628, 4)**

Leicestershire Rutland Water, 13th–24th April (T. P. Appleton, J. Wright *et al.*).

Perth & Kinross Cairnie Pier, ♂ in song, 10th–16th May (A. J. Leitch *et al.*).

Somerset Westhay Moor, ♂ in song, 16th April to 11th May, photo (B. D. Gibbs, A. Hepworth, R. Savage *et al.*). Meare Heath, 16th June to 26th July (D. J. Chown, J. A. Hazell, N. Smith *et al.*).

This species was removed from the list of rarities considered by BBRC at the end of 1982, following a bumper period of records (194 individuals from 1977 to 1982 inclusive) and a scatter of breeding records in the south and east of England. This colonisation, however, was not sustained and the number of records declined slowly, prompting its reinstatement on the BBRC list in 1999. Since then it has remained a great rarity. The singing bird in Perth & Kinross was the ninth for Scotland and the first there away from Shetland. One from Fair Isle, Shetland, on 30th September 2003 still awaits publication as it is currently being assessed as the first British record of the eastern subspecies *L. l. fusca*. As is often the case with subspecies identification, it is not quite as straightforward as it may at first appear, since there is a tendency for differences in plumage to be clinal across the range.

(Breeds discontinuously in W Europe, from Iberia to Netherlands; range contracting to SE, although still expanding NE into Baltic countries. To E, breeds through temperate Russia S through Ukraine to Black Sea coasts. European birds winter in W Africa from Senegal to N Nigeria. C Asian race *fusca* breeds from Caspian Sea E across Kazakhstan to NW China, wintering in NE Africa.)

**Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon* (0, 0, 0)**

1946 Cambridgeshire near Cambridge, 3rd–20th August, breeding pair. After review, identification considered unproven and the record is no longer acceptable.

1965 Buckinghamshire Wendover, 31st July. (*Brit. Birds* 59: 294). After review, identification considered unproven and the record is no longer acceptable.

BBRC has previously reviewed post-1950 records of Moustached Warbler, and rejected all apart from the 1965 Buckinghamshire record (see *Brit. Birds* 93: 29–38). Following the recent review by BOURC (*Brit. Birds* 99: 465–478), the identification of the birds involved in the controversial 1946 breeding attempt near Cambridge was considered unsafe, even though they had been watched for prolonged periods between 3rd and 20th August by several observers, and the record was no longer acceptable as the first British occurrence. This left the 1965 Buckinghamshire bird as the first and only British record. When this record was reviewed, it was considered that the identification was unproven, since Paddyfield Warbler *A. agricola* had not been eliminated. Consequently, Moustached Warbler has been removed from the British List.

(Nominate form largely resident, but inland populations disperse to warmer regions of breeding range outside breeding season. Locally distributed throughout Mediterranean basin from NW Morocco and eastern Spain E to Greece, and N to southern Germany, eastern Austria and Hungary. Other races breed Ukraine and Turkey E to C Asia, wintering from Israel to NW India.)





31. Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*, Torness, Lothian, October 2005.

### Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola* (1, 55, 4)

Kent Cleve Marsh, South Swale, 20th September, trapped, photo (C. G. Bradshaw, J. Pritchard *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 405).

Lothian Torness Power Station, 13th–29th October, photo (D. Allan, W. Clunie, C. N. Davison, B. A. Hickman *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 99: plate 27; plate 31).

Scilly St Mary's, 15th October, photo (J. Hall *et al.*).

Shetland Skaw, Unst, adult, 22nd–23rd June, photo (M. A. Maher *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 282).

Kent's second record follows hot on the heels of the first, at Dungeness on 9th September 2003. It was netted during a routine ringing session, was seen only briefly in the field subsequently and presents further evidence that this species is doubtless being missed in southern reedbeds during the autumn.

(In Europe, restricted to Black Sea coasts from Bulgaria and Danube delta E to Ukraine. To E, breeds widely across steppes of S Russia and SW Siberia, Kazakhstan and NW China, S to Uzbekistan and N Pakistan. Winters throughout Indian subcontinent N of Sri Lanka.)

### Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* (9, 61, 2)

Northumberland St Mary's Island, 17th October (C. Bradshaw, A. Curry, N. P. Dales *et al.*).

Shetland Fair Isle, 16th–17th June, trapped, photo (A. B. Powell, D. N. Shaw, M. D. Warren *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 283).

(Breeds in S Finland, Baltic countries and European Russia to 64°N. To E, found across C Siberia to Lake Baikal and upper Lena River, S through Kazakhstan and Tajikistan to N Pakistan. Winters throughout Indian subcontinent S to Sri Lanka and E into NW Myanmar.)

### Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* (15, 204, 4)

Bedfordshire Willington Gravel-pits, ♂ in song, 15th May to 9th June, photo (M. Thomas *et al.*).

Caernarfonshire Conwy, 10th–18th June (A. Davies *et al.*).

Kent Dungeness, ♂ in song, 18th May (R. J. Price *et al.*).

Shetland Fair Isle, 13th May, trapped, photo (M. D. Warren *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 183).



(Breeds discontinuously throughout much of continental Europe from Iberia to Greece, N to S Sweden and Finland, and E across S Russia, Turkey and Caucasus to W Siberia. C Asian race *zarudnyi* breeds from Volga to NW China. Winters throughout C and S Africa.)

## Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata* (1, 93, 4)

Norfolk Winterton, 1st September (P. Cawley *et al.*).

Northumberland Farne Islands, 16th–17th August, photo (R. Ahmed, D. Steele *et al.*).

Shetland Easter Quarff, Mainland, 2nd–3rd September (R. A. Haywood *et al.*). Fair Isle, 4th–6th September, photo (M. D. Warren *et al.*).

2003 Durham Whitburn, 2nd October (J. P. Cook, D. M. Foster).

(Range expanding W, and breeding in S Finland. To E, breeds C Russia and W Siberia to Yenisey valley, C and N Kazakhstan to W Mongolia and W Xinjiang province, China. Winters N and peninsular India, S to Karnataka.)

## Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* (4, 523, 13)

Devon Lundy, ♂, 17th–18th June, photo (L. H. & R. H. Hurrell).

Highland Dunvegan, Skye, 22nd October (J. Lawson).

Kent Dungeness, ♂, 1st May (J. K. Archer, G. Spinks *et al.*).

Lothian Whitesands Bay, ♂, 28th May (M. Griffin *et al.*).

Northeast Scotland Collieston, ♀, 20th May (P. S. Crockett *et al.*).

Northumberland Farne Islands, first-winter ♀, 10th September, photo (M. A. Maher *et al.*).

Orkney Windwick, South Ronaldsay, ♂, 20th–21st April (P. Higson).

Scilly St Agnes, first-summer ♀, 20th–23rd May (D. Page *et al.*).

Shetland Fair Isle, first-summer ♀, 1st–6th June, photo (H. Price, M. D. Warren *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 227). Toab, Mainland, first-summer ♀, 6th June (P. R. French, H. C. Moncrieff, S. C. Ratch).

Quendale, Mainland, ♂, 20th October (S. J. Minton, R. Riddington).

Sussex Beachy Head, first-summer ♂, 30th April (D. & J. F. Cooper *et al.*).

Yorkshire, East Spurn, first-summer ♂, 1st May (D. Blackmore, L. J. Degnan).

1998 Yorkshire, East Spurn, ♂ *S. c. albistriata*, 12th–13th May, photo (*Brit. Birds* 92: 596); not previously attributed to subspecies.

2001 Essex Fingringhoe Wick, River Colne, ♂, 13th May (Mr & Mrs K. R. Mead).

2004 Shetland Tresta, Fetlar, first-summer ♂, 7th–10th May, photo (P. R. French, M. Smith, B. H. Thomason).

Described by Pallas from an Italian specimen in 1764, this classic Mediterranean-slope (rather than Alpine) scrub warbler was first obtained on St Kilda on 14th June 1894. (It was granted one extra day's life by first appearing on the day before, a Sabbath of the then strict ministry of the isles.) The next six British birds also came in spring; it was the first Irish one, in September 1933, that opened the autumn account. Other autumn birds came in 1953 and it seemed that the Subalpine Warbler was another rarity prone to vagrancy on both its migrations.

From 1966 and particularly from 1975, spring finds mounted rapidly, effectively quadrupling by 1985 (to 76% of all since 1958) and increasing again by half the previous average in the next decade to 1994. Autumn discoveries grew too but not annually, well below the spring trend and that which might have been expected from the increased rarity-hunting in that season.

In the decade from 1995, spring finds have outnumbered autumn ones by five to one. Furthermore, the spring mean date is getting earlier, with two appearing on 26th and 30th March and 32 April individuals making up 21% of all spring records. After a tidal wave of 131 birds from May to July, only 29 were discovered from August to October; the last four have straggled to 9th November. For a Mediterranean dweller, the overall span of 228 days in a temperate land is remarkable; the record number in a year was 36 in 1995.

Although formerly assumed to be a rarity strictly attached to isles and coasts, 13 since 1971 have been found inland. Four of these penetrated the area of the London Natural History Society: three at Barn Elms Reservoirs (now the WWT Wetland Centre) and one at Beddington Sewage-farm. How many other Subalpines (and other so-called rarities) lurk unseen away from Britain's periphery?

In 1971, the BOU accepted that the original St Kilda specimen and a bird on Fair Isle in May 1966 were nominate *cantillans*, while another two birds from Fair Isle in May 1951 and April 1964 resem-

bled *albistriata*. Confidence in such separations ebbed, however, and, with both Svensson (1992) and BWP (1992) stating that the species' racial radiation was still incompletely understood, BBRC remained shy of trinomial attributions. Suddenly, in the 1993 report, the Committee did allow six spring males to be logged as *albistriata* but then again fell silent. In 1996, Vinicombe & Cottridge postulated that the later dated spring males at northern localities were mostly *albistriata*. With range extensions known in Romania and Bulgaria, the thought had merit; indeed, it had occurred to Ken Williamson 22 years earlier (Williamson 1974).

Following Shirihai *et al.* 2000, fresh attention was directed to all British occurrences, in spring (e.g. Cade & Walker 2004) and even autumn (e.g. Gantlett 2001). In 2003, BBRC announced that a review was underway of all records since 1993, and until this is complete, further comment on racial occurrence patterns seems pointless. It should not be forgotten, however, that all races mix readily on passage. In Malta in 1914, Wardlaw Ramsay (1923) noted two shot *albistriata* on 4th September and two shot *cantillans* only five days later. Similarly, in winter many *albistriata* end up over 20° west of their main breeding haunts.

Given the sinkholes of subadult male, female and immature plumages, is Britain really the venue for subspecific study of this species? No claims for the species from 2000 to 2004 have been rejected but in the past the species has been confused with Spectacled Warbler *S. conspicillata* in autumn. The full account of the first accepted autumn record of the latter is helpful in understanding how distinctive the other 'mini-Whitethroat' is (Broyd 2000).

Since it is not accorded rarity status in south European countries, other vagrancy records of Subalpine Warbler are difficult to assess but overshoots have reached Iceland, Ireland, the Low Countries, northern Europe east to Poland and even Ukraine. Birds from Madeira and Cape Verdes have demonstrated even more exceptional wandering. Despite some decline in both the French and Greek populations of Subalpine Warbler between 1990 and 2000 (BirdLife International 2004), the European population as a whole appears essentially stable, so the upsurge of British spring records is surprising. With no further growth since 1995, however, it may well have stalled.

BirdLife International. 2004. *Birds in Europe: population estimates, trends and conservation status*. BirdLife, Cambridge.

Broyd, S. 2000. The Spectacled Warbler on the Isles of Scilly. *Birding World* 13: 418–419.

Cade, M., & Walker, D. 2004. Eastern Subalpine Warblers in spring 2004. *Birding World* 17: 202–203.

Gantlett, S. 2001. Subalpine Warbler forms in Britain. *Birding World* 14: 482–483.

Shirihai, H., Gargallo, G., Helbig, A., Harris, A., & Cottridge, D. M. 2000. Subalpine Warbler: identification, ageing and sexing. *Birding World* 13: 234–250.

Svensson, L. 1992. *Identification Guide to European Passerines*. 4th edn. Privately published, Stockholm.

Wardlaw Ramsay, R. G. 1923. *Guide to the Birds of Europe and North Africa*. Gurney and Jackson, London and Edinburgh.

Williamson, K. 1974. *Identification for Ringers 3: The Genus Sylvia*. BTO, Tring.

(Four races widely but locally distributed throughout Mediterranean basin from NW Africa and Iberia N to S France, and E to Greece and W Turkey. Winters S of Sahara from Mauritania and Senegal to S Egypt and Sudan.)

## Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* (0, 71, 2)

Fife Fife Ness Muir, ♂, 15th October to at least 3rd November, trapped (A. MacCormick, M. Oksien *et al.*).

Shetland Lerwick, Mainland, ♀, 2nd–4th June (D. Coutts, P. V. Harvey *et al.*).

(Largely resident or dispersive throughout Mediterranean basin, from NW Africa and Iberia to S France, N Italy and E to W Turkey and Israel. Some winter in N Africa from Sahara S to Mauritania and S Libya.)

## Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* (5, 406, 35) European and W Siberian race *P. t. viridanus*

Cleveland Seaton Snook, 10th–11th September (S. C. Bell, G. Icton *et al.*). South Gare, two, 10th September, photo (N. A. Preston *et al.*). West View, Hartlepool, 11th September (G. Joynt).

Durham Whitburn, two, first-winters, 4th–6th September, photo (J. P. Cook, T. I. Mills, B. Unwin *et al.*). Trow Quarry, South Shields, 10th–12th September, photo (J. Chapman, M. Newsome *et al.*).

Marsden Quarry, South Shields, 15th–16th October, photo (P. T. Bell, T. I. Mills, M. Newsome *et al.*).

Lincolnshire Saltfleet Haven, 11th September, photo (G. P. Catley, N. Drinkall *et al.*).

Norfolk Thornham, 1st September, photo (P. Eele, A. Grimsey *et al.*). Blakeney Point, 10th September, photo (R. F. Porter, A. M. Stoddart *et al.*). Scolt Head, 12th September (N. M. Lawton *et al.*).

Northumberland Farne Islands, 10th–11th September, photo (N. Dawson *et al.*). Low Hauxley, 10th–11th September (M. J. Carr). Newbiggin, 10th September (S. J. McElwee, J. G. Steele *et al.*). Hauxley, first-winter, 11th September (I. Fisher).

Scilly St Agnes, 28th September (T. Folland, J. M. Turton *et al.*). St Martin's, 27th October, photo (D. Le Croisette, P. Sterry *et al.*).

Shetland Norwick, Unst, adult, 13th–15th August, trapped, photo (M. A. Maher, M. G. Pennington *et al.*). Noss, 31st August to 5th September, photo (K. Bliss, T. J. Sykes *et al.*). Quendale, Mainland, first-winter, 5th September (R. M. Mellor *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 351). Sumburgh, Mainland, adult, 11th September, photo (P. V. Harvey, R. Riddington *et al.*).

Wester Quarff, Mainland, first-winter, 26th September to 13th October (R. A. Haywood *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 406; plate 32).

Sussex Beachy Head, 7th–9th

October, photo (M. Casemore, D. & J. F. Cooper *et al.*).

Yorkshire, East Flamborough Head, ♂ in song, 27th May, photo (T. Dixon *et al.*); 5th September (R. Baines); 6th–8th September, photo (F. X. Moffatt *et al.*); 10th September (A. M. Hanby, G. Waddington *et al.*); 11th September (F. X. Moffatt, I. Sims); 11th–13th September (J. B. Leason, F. X. Moffatt). Spurn, 31st August (I. C. & S. J. M. Whitehouse); 10th–12th September (A. J. & M. G. Stoye); 10th–13th September, photo (A. Roadhouse, C. Featherstone, S. Routledge *et al.*). Kilnsea, 10th September (G. Picton, M. J. Pilsworth *et al.*).

Yorkshire, North Ffiley Country Park, 3rd–5th September (J. M. Turton *et al.*).

2004 Fife Fife Ness Muir, two, 25th August (G. Owens, R. Shand *et al.*).

Ever defying those who wish for one species to be three tickable forms, the complex radiation of the Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* is perhaps the best example of an avian 'ring species' (Collinson 2001). Three of its six subspecies, the most migratory, have reached Britain.

#### 'Western Greenish Warbler' *Ph. t. viridanus*

The western race was first described by Blyth from wintering birds at Calcutta and in Nepal in 1843. The first British example was secured by G. H. Caton-Haigh, as it tried to recuperate after a drift to North Cotes, Lincolnshire, on 5th September 1896, 56 days ahead of Britain's first Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Ph. proregulus*. Like the 'seven-striped sprite', Greenish Warbler remained undetected for another half century. The second was one of the earliest post-war rarities and one of the last to be shot, an adult on Whalsay, Shetland, on 12th September 1945.

From 1949 to 1957, a scatter of early observatory finds had all the signs of the bird's future status: one on 20th April (at Spurn and still the earliest ever), two (one in song) in June and seven from mid July to mid September. After a succession of westward surges of breeding birds into Fennoscandia, presumably from the north Russian population (most recently in the early 1990s, just ahead of the largest-ever British influx, of 40 in 1995), *viridanus* has become one of the more commonly found and most regularly dated of rarities. There are peaks in early June and late August (or in early September in 2005) and the overall pattern of occurrence recalls that of the Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*



32. Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*, Wester Quarff, Shetland, October 2005.

Hugh Harrop



(Wallace 1999). Oddly, however, for a bird whose total range extends east to Japan, it has remained relatively scarce in late autumn (with only 6% of records dated from late September to early November). If far-eastern individuals do reach Britain as 'reversed migrants', they are seemingly far less prone to navigational error than the partly sympatric Yellow-browed *Ph. inornatus* and Pallas's Leaf Warblers.

When, particularly in the 1960s, its differentiation from 'eastern' Common Chiffchaffs *Ph. collybita* sporting wing-bars was insecure, there were more acceptances of Greenish Warblers that came late in autumn and even wintered. Twenty of these were removed in an exhaustive review (Dean 1985) and the species has yet to resurface in our milder winter habitats that have tempted several other Asian warblers. Conversely, the findings of spring birds, often males in song, have risen to 24. These must presumably stem from the buoyant population of over 8,000 pairs in Finland and the Baltic States or the more fitful colonisers of Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland (Mitchell & Young 1999). South of these countries, *viridanus* remains a distinctly scarce vagrant, with only 38 records in six countries from Belgium south to Spain and west to Ireland (up to 1996).

### 'Two-barred Greenish Warbler' *Ph. t. plumbeitarsus*

First described in 1861 by Swinhoe from Hopeh, China, this more contrasting, greener or more olive bird overlaps with *viridanus* in southern Siberia (Vaurie 1959). In the Hamardaban range west of Lake Baikal, *plumbeitarsus* inhabits the forest of mixed taiga but leaves an uppermost belt of small scattered trees in scree to *viridanus*. In 1993, the local Russian ornithologists were separating them on song and without optical aids (P. A. Lassey pers. comm.). Clearly, some birds are in the 'watershed' of Siberian vagrants to Britain.

The three British records (at the time of writing) have been found on Scilly, on 21st–27th October 1987 and 27th–28th September 2003, and at Holkham, Norfolk, on 15th–16th October 1996 (Kemp 1996; Bradshaw 2001; Dodgson 2003). Another, at Filey, North Yorkshire, on 16th–18th October 2006 is awaiting assessment; and see also Stoddart (2003). The only other European records are of single birds in autumn in Finland and The Netherlands and, astonishingly, a July bird in Sweden, all since 1990. The mean arrival date for the autumn birds is about 5th October, four weeks later than the peak period for *viridanus*.

### 'Green Warbler' *Ph. t. nitidus*

Yet another taxon first described by Blyth in 1843 from Calcutta and restricted when breeding to southwest Asia, Green Warbler delivered one of the biggest-ever surprises to British observers when one appeared on Scilly from 26th September to 4th October 1984. In fact, it had been 'trailed' 116 years earlier when the bird harvesters of Heligoland produced one for Heinrich Gätke on 11th October 1867. Along with the partly sympatric Plain Leaf Warbler *Ph. neglectus* in Sweden on 10th October 1991, these three individuals make up an intriguing trio of truly extraordinary vagrants.

The best identification texts for the Greenish Warbler complex are Beaman & Madge (1998) and van der Vliet *et al.* (2001). The Committee's view of the diagnostic characters of *plumbeitarsus* was noted in 2004 (*Brit. Birds* 97: 610). The recent (2000–04) rejection rate for *viridanus* has been 7%. With little evidence of really far-flung vagrancy, *viridanus* hardly qualifies as a classic 'reversed migrant' but its sibling taxa *plumbeitarsus* and *nitidus* do; note that both of the rarer forms remain subject to full BBRC disciplines.

Beaman, M., & Madge, S. 1998. *The Handbook of Bird Identification*. Helm, London.

Bradshaw, C. 2001. 'Two-barred Greenish Warbler' on Scilly: new to Britain and Ireland. *Brit. Birds* 94: 284–288.

Collinson, M. 2001. Greenish Warbler, 'Two-barred Greenish Warbler' and the speciation process. *Brit. Birds* 94: 278–283.

Dean, A. R. 1985. Review of British status and identification of Greenish Warbler. *Brit. Birds* 78: 437–451.

Dodgson, S. 2003. The Two-barred Greenish Warbler on Scilly. *Birding World* 16: 422.

Kemp, J. 1996. The Two-barred Greenish Warbler at Wells. *Birding World* 9: 396–397.

Mitchell, D., & Young, S. 1999. *Photographic Handbook of the Rare Birds of Britain and Europe*. New Holland, London.

Stoddart, A. 2003. From the Rarities Committee's files: the Holme wing-barred *Phylloscopus* warbler. *Brit. Birds* 96: 74–78.

van der Vliet, R. E., Kennerley, P. R., & Small, B. J. 2001. Identification of Two-barred, Greenish, Bright-green and Arctic Warblers.

*Dutch Birding* 23: 175–191.

Vaurie, C. 1959. *The Birds of the Palearctic Fauna. Passeriformes*. H. F. & G. Witherby Ltd, London.

Wallace, D. I. M. 1999. History of the Common Rosefinch in Britain and Ireland, 1869–1996. *Brit. Birds* 92: 445–471.

(The European and W Siberian race *viridanus* has expanded W during 20th century to E Poland, Baltic countries

and S Finland, with sporadic breeding in Germany, Czech Republic, Sweden and Norway. To E, breeds through Russia and W Siberia to Yenisey River, S through NW Mongolia to N Afghanistan and NW Himalayas. Winters throughout Indian subcontinent. Other races occur throughout Himalayas to SW China, wintering from Indian subcontinent to Indochina.)

### Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* (12, 254, 8)

Dorset Reap Lane, Southwell, 9th–12th October, photo (N. Hopper *et al.*).

Orkney Herston, South Ronaldsay, first-winter, 4th September (P. Higson, J. A. & R. McCutcheon).

Scilly St Mary's, 6th September, photo (A. Gardener *et al.*). St Martin's, 12th October (B. Minnett-Smith, J. R. Walsh *et al.*).

Shetland Fair Isle, 22nd–23rd June, trapped, photo (M. D. Warren *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 284).

Gorie, Bressay, 2nd–6th September, photo (D. P. Hall, S. J. Minton, T. J. Sykes *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 407). Skaw, Unst, 2nd September, photo (M. G. Pennington *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 352).

Foula, first-winter, 3rd–4th September, trapped, photo (A. R. Mainwood).

(Breeds locally in N Scandinavia, becoming widespread across N Russia E to extreme NE Siberia, S to Baikal region, Ussuriland and NE China. Other races breed in Alaska, and Kamchatka through Kuril Islands to N Japan. Migrant through E China to winter widely in SE Asia to Java, Philippines and Sulawesi.)

### Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei* (0, 83, 2)

Devon Seaton Hole, at least 26th November to 3rd December, photo (G. M. Haig, S. D. Waite *et al.*).

Yorkshire, North Filey, 7th–30th December, photo (S. Cochrane, J. Harwood, C. C. Thomas *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 99: plate 45).

2002 Scilly St Mary's, 12th–15th November (K. Webb *et al.*).

(Breeds in Altai Mountains, S through Tien Shan and Pamirs to NE Afghanistan, NW Himalayas and mountains of NW China. Winters in S Afghanistan to N India, E to W Bengal. Another race breeds in C China from Shanxi to S Yunnan, W to lower slopes of Tibetan Plateau.)

### Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi* (1, 258, 12)

Cleveland South Gare, 16th October (C. Dodsworth *et al.*).

Devon Prawle Point, 7th October (P. M. Mayer).

Dorset Portland, 10th October, photo (P. Morgan, per J. A. Lidster).

Fife Isle of May, 16th October, trapped, photo (D. A. Bell, A. J. Gramauskas *et al.*).

Hampshire Sherborne St John, 7th December (N. Montegriffo *et al.*).

Kent Bockhill, St Margaret's, 3rd–4th October, photo (P. Chantler *et al.*).

Scilly Gugh, 5th–6th October (P. A. Dukes *et al.*). St Agnes, 10th October (A. Jayne); 10th–14th



George Reszeter

33. Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*, St Agnes, Scilly, October 2005.



October, photo (M. & N. Gatward *et al.*) (plate 33). St Martin's, 12th October (P. Lymbery, R. Peach, J. R. Walsh *et al.*).

Sussex Icklesham, 12th October, trapped, photo (D. Fletcher, P. Jones *et al.*).

Yorkshire, East Sammy's Point, Easington, 8th–9th October, photo (R. Dale, L. J. Degnan, H. Hipperson *et al.*).

2004 Northumberland Farne Islands, 30th September (C. Dodd, D. Parnaby, D. Steele).

First described by Gustav Radde in 1863 from Transbaikalia, this rather vivid and robust bird wandered through three generic names before Claud Ticehurst placed it firmly in *Phylloscopus*. The first British bird fell to the shotgun of G. H. Caton-Haigh at North Cotes, Lincolnshire, on 1st October 1898. Having the most restricted and southerly breeding range of all the warblers that stray west from Siberia, it remained a mythological being for over six decades, escaping even observatory hunters until 1961. On 3rd October, a bird trapped on Blakeney Point, Norfolk, drew the BTO's then Migration Research Officer, Ken Williamson, into the first-ever overnight 'professional twitch'. Roosted in Richard Richardson's aviary, it was released the following morning in front of a few much-envied admirers.

With the appearance of the second Dusky Warbler *Ph. fuscatus* on Fair Isle, Shetland, only 11 days later (and the second and third Pallas's Leaf Warblers *Ph. proregulus* already in the observatories' bag), expectations of more sympatrically breeding vagrants from as far east as Lake Baikal were dramatically raised and never lowered. Over the following 44 years, Radde's Warblers have been found increasingly and major influxes of up to 30 birds occurred in 1982, 1988, 1991 and 2000. None of these have been synchronised with exceptional arrivals of Dusky Warblers and, unlike the case with that species, there are no spring records of Radde's while the first winter record was not until December 2005. Furthermore, although in 2000 it briefly went ahead of Dusky in grand-total terms, its records have collapsed in the last five years to an average of only six.

In Fennoscandia and the rest of Europe, the long-noted southerly bias in its British occurrences is similarly evident and Radde's Warbler has been found notably less frequently than Dusky Warbler. As the latter's breeding area is at least three times as large as that of Radde's and ranges at least 7° further north, the difference in status of these two warblers within Europe makes more sense than the overall similarity portrayed in the British record.

The once over-emphasised risk of confusing Radde's and Dusky Warblers was first reduced by Johns & Wallace (1972) and fully removed by Madge (1990). No claims were rejected from 2000 to 2004. Since a third of the breeding area of Radde's Warbler lies west of the Lake Baikal 'watershed', young birds with faulty orientation fully qualify as 'reversed migrants' (Vinicombe & Cottridge 1996).

Johns, R. J., & Wallace, D. I. M. 1972. Field identification of Dusky and Radde's Warblers. *Brit. Birds* 65: 497–501.

Madge, S. 1990. Separating Radde's and Dusky Warblers. *Birding World* 3: 281–285.

(Breeds in S Siberia from Novosibirsk region E to Ussuriland and NE China. Migrates through E China to winter in N Myanmar, Indochina and C Thailand.)

## Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* (1, 296, 12)

Borders St Abb's Head, 15th October (D. Graham).

Cleveland Boulby Cliffs, 19th–22nd October, trapped, photo (S. Farish, D. A. Money, R. C. Taylor *et al.*).

Kent Dungeness, 8th October (R. H. Bonser, M. Lopez, S. Mills); 12th–13th November, photo (D. Bunney, O. J. Leyshon *et al.*).

Lothian Scoughall, 22nd–23rd October (K. Gillon, C. Scott *et al.*).

Norfolk Wells East Hills, 19th–28th October (R. Martin, J. R. McCallum *et al.*).

Shetland Voe, 16th–19th October, photo (S. Stirrup, T. Wilson *et al.*). Norwick, Unst, 20th October, photo (M. A. Maher, B. H. Thomason *et al.*).

Suffolk Kessingland, first-winter, since 2004 to 18th April, photo, see 2004 Suffolk, below. Trimley Marsh, 4th January (N. Odin). Southwold, 16th October (A. Riseborough, R. Walden).

Sussex Climping, 7th–10th October (J. Dodd, O. Mitchell).

Yorkshire, East Spurn, 7th–16th October, trapped, photo (P. Collins, E. Williams *et al.*).

2003 Scilly St Mary's, 9th–30th November, photo (E. A. Fisher, N. Hudson *et al.*).

2004 Dorset Hengistbury Head, 11th October (D. N. Smith).

2004 Suffolk Kessingland, first-winter, 2nd December to 18th April 2005, trapped, photo (P. Read,



R. Wincup *et al.* (*Brit. Birds* 98: 680, plate 59); note corrected dates and observers.

Yet another species first described by Blyth from Calcutta, in 1842, this ground-hugging, wing-flicking and tail-spreading warbler with the hard call of a *Sylvia* was first obtained in Britain on Auskerry, Orkney, on 1st October 1913, three days after the arrival of a Yellow-browed Warbler *Ph. inornatus*. It took cover in a nettle patch but the formidable trio of William Eagle Clarke, Claud Ticehurst and George Stout was its nemesis. After a comparison with other specimens of leaf warblers, it was confirmed to be a female Dusky and also the first for Europe.

Apart from one in Sussex in 1916, which went the way of all Hastings rarities, there was no further sign of Dusky until 1961, when a bird was trapped on Fair Isle, Shetland, on 14th October. From 1964, observatory and other watchpoint enthusiasts began to find others and in 1968, there was the first-ever multiple fall (four birds), on the Norfolk coast. This upsurge of records spoke of truly increased and extended vagrancy, further indicated by the close-dated association in 1968 of 17 Pallas's Leaf *Ph. proregulus* and three Radde's Warblers *Ph. schwarzi*. We had never seen anything like it in just one autumn!

From 1973, the bird became virtually annual, with irregular but mounting peaks in 1976 (5), 1980 (4), 1982 (7), 1987 (16), 1990 (18), 1994 (21), 1997 (18), 2001 (26), 2003 (25) and 2004 (22). Its overall increase is clearly above the trend of any human factor and has been associated closely with the surges of Pallas's Leaf Warblers and, latterly, Hume's Warblers *Ph. humei*. For once this phenomenon is sufficiently cohesive to allow some conjecture on its cause. Far-flung multiple vagrancies are likely to be driven by the combination of above-average breeding success, hence greater numbers of potentially 'reversed migrants', and exceptionally sustained tailwinds. This engine should drive simultaneous westwards surges in all sympatric migratory species. It does not, but it is difficult to rule it out in the case of the above trio of leaf warblers. If one overlays their breeding ranges, a quite localised common source is evident around 48°N 90°E or about 1,000 km WSW of the 'watershed' of Lake Baikal, amid the headwaters of the Yenisey and below the Siberian Altai.

Although often paired by us with Radde's Warbler, the Dusky has maintained a rather different occurrence pattern, with more northerly and usually tardier records. From Shetland south to southeast England, birds appear on average ten days later and outnumber Radde's by 20% but the birds that go on to Scilly and Ireland make up time, being on average only three days later there but being outnumbered by Radde's by 120%. That a few Dusky Warblers actually stop to winter in the southwest is now evident.

Reference to the bird's European vagrancy pattern has been made under Radde's Warbler but it can be added that in its wider European occurrences the Dusky never fails to surprise. Two November birds in Portugal, a January one in Gibraltar, another in Greece in April and a last in Italy in May, all between 1978 and 1994, are intriguing – three turns south, one stop (on a rock covered in its classic low cover) and two head-backs to Asia? Only one Radde's is known to have reached Iberia, in 1966.

An excellent word portrait of the Dusky Warbler was drawn in Vinicombe & Cottridge (1996). The recent rejection rate has been 5%.

(Breeds in Siberia from Ob River N to 60°N, E to Sea of Okhotsk, S to Russian Altai, N Mongolia and Ussuriland through NE China. Winters Nepal to S China and SE Asia to Singapore. Another race breeds on Tibetan Plateau.)

## Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli* (1, 70, 5)

Cornwall Treeve Common, 13th September (M. T. Elliott *et al.*).

Scilly St Agnes, first-winter, 29th August to 2nd September (D. Page, V. A. Stratton *et al.*). St Mary's, 30th August to 9th September, photo (T. Folland, N. Hudson, N. Watmough *et al.*).

Shetland Fair Isle, 10th September, trapped, photo (D., D. R. & J. F. Cooper *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 408).

Sussex Beachy Head, 2nd–4th September (R. H. & M. E. Charlwood, R. K. Haggard *et al.*).

2004 Yorkshire, North Bampton, 30th–31st August (J. M. Bayldon, T. D. Charlton *et al.*).

(Breeding range centred on SW Europe from Iberia to N France, S Germany, Italy, Austria, and locally in mountains of N Africa. Winters along S edge of Sahara, from Senegal and S Mauritania to N Cameroon.)

## Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus ibericus* (0, 11, 0)

2004 Cornwall Windmill Farm, The Lizard, ♂ in song, 30th April to 3rd May, photo (A. R. Pay *et al.*).

(Breeds locally in French Pyrenees and S throughout W Iberia. N African range restricted to NW Morocco and N Algeria to NW Tunisia. Wintering range poorly known.)

## Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla* (0, 22, 2)

Kent Dungeness, 2nd and 8th May (S. Davies, D. Walker).

Another record from Kent remains under consideration, as does a spring record from Essex, at Bradwell in April. Dungeness maintains its undisputed position as the most favoured location for this species in Britain. If accepted, the Bradwell bird would be only the second record for Essex, and would give renewed hope for observers outside Kent; there have been only four previous records away from Kent (one in Yorkshire and two in Dorset, in addition to the one in Essex) and none since 1979.

(Widespread resident throughout continental W Europe, from S Spain N to Denmark and E to Poland, W Ukraine and Greece. Elsewhere, resident in mountains of N Africa, W Turkey and W Caucasus.)

## Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* (0, 189, 10)

Greater London/Essex Rainham Marshes, ♀/immature, 9th October (P. Hawkins, D. Morrison); three, ♀/immature and two ♂♂s, intermittently 18th December to March 2006, photo (D. Moreton, J. Park, I. Smith *et al.*); three, two ♀♀/immatures and ♂, 19th December to March 2006, maximum count six on 19th December (H. Vaughan *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 99: plate 46).

Kent Pegwell Bay, Thanet, juvenile, 27th October (P. Forrest, T. N. Hodge, F. Solly).

Sussex Beachy Head, ♂, 11th October (D. R. & J. F. Cooper). Icklesham, first-winter, 14th November, trapped (P. Jones, S. J. Rumsey, J. Willsher *et al.*).

2004 Kent Dungeness, two, adults, 26th October (R. J. Price *et al.*).

2004 Somerset Ham Wall NNR, four, 21st January (B. Chick).

(Widely but locally distributed throughout C and E Europe, from Denmark, Germany and Italy NE to C Sweden and Estonia. Absent from much of NW Europe but locally numerous in Spain. To E, breeds from S Russia to Volga River. Largely resident or dispersive in Europe. Other forms, sometimes regarded as separate species, occur in C Asia and from S Siberia to NE China, and winter NW Indian subcontinent, S China and S Japan.)

## Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus* (0, 67, 1)

Angus & Dundee Maryton, Montrose Basin, 22nd–28th October, photo (R. A. Bramhall *et al.*).

Annual totals of Isabelline Shrike have been relatively consistent in Britain recently, with between one and seven (in 1988) records in all but three years since 1977 (there was none in 1983, 1986 and 1992). Adults can arrive at any time, although June is a good month and the late summer/early autumn is also a favoured period; first-winters typically appear from mid October to early November, though some reach Britain in late September (see fig. 2). Fig. 3 illustrates the geographical spread of British records.

As has been mentioned in several recent annual reports, BBRC has been attempting to review the

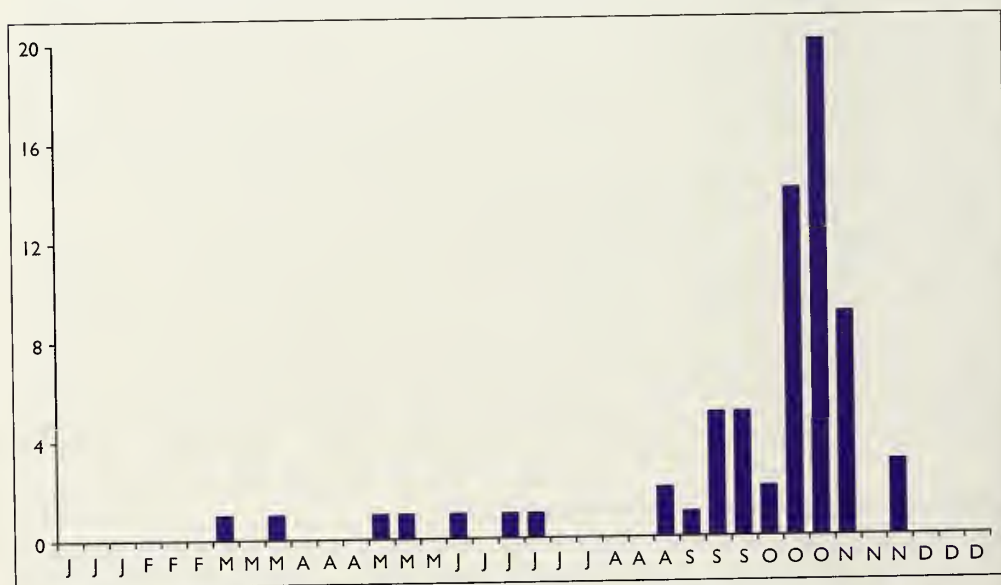


Fig. 2. Arrival times of Isabelline Shrikes *Lanius isabellinus* in Britain, 1950–2005, in ten-day periods.

racial identity of records of Isabelline Shrike (an article is in preparation which will explain our decisions in more detail). The Committee is still in the strange position of feeling on the one hand confident in the identification of most (but not all) adults, while on the other having the picture of first-winters confused by the messages coming from those travelling in the taxonomic 'melting pot' of central Asia. As has been said before, and put very simplistically, the view coming from the region where Isabelline Shrikes breed is, increasingly, that the disputed form '*karelini*' (first described by Russian researchers, along with additional forms (see *BIVP*), but not widely accepted) may breed sympatrically with *L. i. phoenicuroides*. It is still not known whether '*karelini*' is a variant of *phoenicuroides*, a hybrid population or indeed a separate subspecies, and this confuses any picture we may have of what it looks like. The recent discovery of apparent intergrade pairings between the recognised races further complicates the issue, and reinforces the need to attempt to assign to form only those individuals showing the full suite of characters.

Adult *phoenicuroides* ('Turkestan Shrike') is often typified by a rusty or rufous crown, white supercilium, earth-brown mantle and largely white underparts – females show the same pattern but with less strong coloration. Birds showing these characters but lacking the rufous crown have been attributed to *karelini*, apparent individuals of this form also showing a greyer or sandy cast to the upperparts. Adult *isabellinus* ('Daurian Shrike') has upperparts with a more sandy colour overall, with just a hint of ginger at times; the supercilium is washed orange, as are the underparts – sometimes quite strongly so – the cheeks and the throat. One might expect first-winters to possess the same general features as adults; to some degree it is thought that they do, and young birds often seem to fall into the two camps. However, the problem for the Committee lies with the unknown quantity that is immature '*karelini*'. Consequently, the Committee feels that, for the time being at least, it will try to assign adults to race, but that first-winters are best left as only possibles – the term 'showing the characters of' is imprecise but may be useful.

The following recent records have been assigned to race:

- 1989 Borders Dunglass, adult ♀ *isabellinus*, 13th September.
- 1991 Orkney North Ronaldsay, adult ♂ *isabellinus*, 28th October to 2nd November.
- 1994 Greater London Richmond, ♂ *isabellinus*, 21st March.
- 1994 Shetland Fair Isle, adult ♀ *phoenicuroides*, 23rd–24th August, trapped.
- 1995 Norfolk Snettisham, adult ♂ *phoenicuroides*, 2nd May.
- 1998 Anglesey Cemlyn Bay, ♀ *phoenicuroides*, 2nd July to 8th August.
- 2000 Cambridgeshire Nene Washes, ♀ *isabellinus*, 8th–9th September.
- 2002 Cornwall first-summer ♂ *phoenicuroides*, 26th June.
- 2002 Shetland Fetlar, *isabellinus*, 14th–17th September.
- 2003 Somerset Porlock Marsh, ♂ *phoenicuroides*, 3rd June.

The problem with earlier records is that the descriptions often lack the critical detail needed to help with racial identification. The three records listed below have previously been tentatively assigned to race, but during the review the Committee felt that these racial attributions are still not completely proven. In the case of the 1960 Fair Isle record, there is a good photograph of the bird in the hand, which should help; although the print has a cyan cast, the shrike appears to be a *phoenicuroides*.

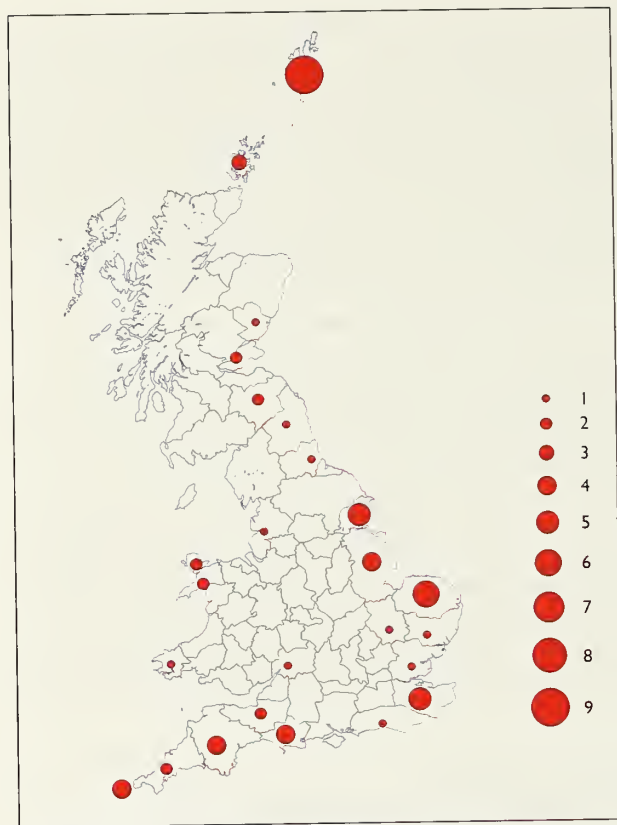
- (1950 Fife Isle of May, adult ♂, thought to be *phoenicuroides*, 26th September.)
- (1960 Shetland Fair Isle, adult ♂ *phoenicuroides*, 12th–13th May, trapped.)
- (1975 Sussex, West Sidlesham, ♂ *isabellinus*, in song, 1st March to 20th April.)

There is some dispute concerning the racial identity of the following record. The Committee is currently reviewing descriptions of this striking individual, which is in general terms described as having pale greyish upperparts and a slight wash of pink or pinkish-buff on the underparts, being most marked on the flanks. This may be an example of adult male *karelini*. The possibility of it being influenced by Red-backed Shrike genes has also been suggested. The fact that the racial identity of such a well-marked individual remains in doubt provides a vivid illustration of the problems faced.

- 1982 Lincolnshire Anderby Creek, adult ♂, 7th–8th November; presumed same, Gibraltar Point, 15th.

The two following birds were previously assigned to a particular form and published as such, but these racial attributions are now considered unsafe:





**Fig. 3.** Accepted records of Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus* in Britain, 1950–2005.

1975 Norfolk Holkham, 12th–13th October.

1990 Lincolnshire Donna Nook, first-winter, 14th–15th October.

The following two records were previously published with incorrect age attributions:

1959 Dorset Portland Bill, 10th September; published previously as first-winter, should read adult ♀.

1985 Dorset Portland Bill, 15th–23rd September; published previously as first-winter, should read adult ♀.

The following records were previously published with age attributions, but are now considered not safe to be aged conclusively:

1979 Shetland Fair Isle, 24th October.

1985 Anglesey Holyhead, 25th October.

1988 Essex Bradwell, 23rd–28th October.

1988 Norfolk Horsey Gap, 26th October.

1991 Kent North Foreland, 28th October.

1995 Pembrokeshire St David's, 27th October.

The following records were previously published with no age attributions:

1978 Dorset Winspit, 14th–24th October; should read first-winter.

1978 Scilly St Agnes, 26th–27th October, same, Gugh 28th October; should read first-winter.

1991 Scilly St Mary's, 12th October; should read first-winter.

(Four races breed C Asia, from Caspian Sea and W Iran through Kazakhstan to Tajikistan, Afghanistan and N Pakistan to S Mongolia and NW China, with isolated population from Zaidam depression to N Tibetan Plateau. Winters in NE and E Africa, S Arabian Peninsula, S Iran and NW Indian subcontinent.)

### Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* (22, 148, 2)

Yorkshire, East Spurn, first-winter, 2nd September, photo (S. D. Waite *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 354); age uncertain, 24th–30th September, trapped, photo (P. Collins, S. & P. Jones, B. Winspear).

(European range centred E of Balkans to E Poland, with small numbers W through N Mediterranean to S France and NE Spain. To E, breeds locally from Black Sea coasts, across S Russia and Kazakhstan to extreme NW China and SW Siberia. Migrates through E Africa to winter in S Africa, from Namibia to S Mozambique and N South Africa.)

### Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*

#### W Mediterranean islands race *L. s. badius* (0, 4, 1)

Avon Uphill, Weston-super-Mare, first-summer, 11th–13th June, photo (P. Bowyer, N. Workman *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 230; plate 34).

1980 Suffolk Sizewell, 15th–18th June (J. T. Belsey, C. Towe, T. J. Urbanowicz *et al.*).

The Avon record provided the first chance for many to catch up with the west Mediterranean race *badius* in Britain, and it was certainly one of the main attractions in June 2005, which is clearly the month to look for them. The 1980 Suffolk record is now the first for Britain, and came to light after

the article outlining the identification criteria and request for more submissions (Small & Walbridge 2005). At the time, it was well twitched, but how many that saw it realised the significance of the lack of a primary-patch? Although it was depicted in a published drawing as showing a white primary-patch, the photographs show a stunning male *badius* lacking a primary-patch, with a narrow black forehead, pure white underparts, no pale fringes on the coverts, and a faded-looking rufous crown.



34. First-summer 'Balearic Woodchat Shrike' *Lanius senator badius*, Uphill, Weston-super-Mare, June 2005.

Paul Bowyer

Small, B. J., & Walbridge, G. 2005. From the Rarities Committee's files: A review of the identification of 'Balearic' Woodchat Shrike, and details of three British records. *Brit. Birds* 98: 32–42.

(Restricted to islands in W Mediterranean, including Balearics, Corsica and Sardinia, E to Elba and Capraia. Migrates to W Africa, from Ivory Coast to N Cameroon.)

### Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus* (0, 101, 2)

Devon Lundy, 29th–30th September, photo (T. Davis, T. Jones *et al.*).

Scilly St Mary's, 3rd–4th October, photo (R. Addison, I. T. Barnard *et al.*).

Just two records in 2005, from typical locations and on predictable dates. The Devon record constitutes the seventh for Lundy, with East Prawle (two) and Dawlish Warren (one) accounting for the other three county records since 1949. Although 2005 was a lean year, it is now six years since the last blank year (1999). This is still the most numerous Nearctic passerine and, away from the southwest, it has been recorded in seven east-coast counties from Kent north to Lothian. It can be only a matter of time before one turns up in such a well-watched county as Norfolk; the lack of any Shetland records is also surprising. Elsewhere, 'northern' records have included one in the Western Isles, as well as 18 records from Iceland (<http://www.hi.is/~yannk/index-eng.html>).

(Breeds throughout S Canada, and USA E of Rocky Mountains. Migrates throughout E USA to winter in N South America. Other races resident in South America.)

### Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni* (23, 803, 2)

Shetland Fair Isle, *C. h. exilipes*, first-winter ♂, 20th October, photo (P. A. A. Baxter, A. J. Bull, D. N. Shaw *et al.*).

Suffolk Icklingham, *C. h. exilipes*, 31st December to at least 5th February 2006, photo (L. V. Gregory, T. Humpage *et al.*).

1985 Yorkshire, North Heslington, York, *C. h. exilipes*, 28th–30th January, photo (R. D. Gregory, R. S. Slack).

2004 Argyll Tiree, 23rd October (J. Bowler).

2004 Norfolk Titchwell, *C. h. exilipes*, 10th December to 4th April 2005 (per G. E. Dunmore).

2004 Outer Hebrides Eoligarry, Barra, *C. h. hornemanni*, 7th June, photo (D. Pentelow, J. Poyner *et al.*).

2004 Shetland Mid Yell, Yell, 15th October, photo (B. H. Thomason). Uyeasound, Unst, *C. h. hornemanni*, 15th October (B. H. Thomason).

Nominate *hornemanni* of the highest tundra in Canada and Greenland was described by Holboell in 1843; the smaller, almost circumpolar but generally more southerly *exilipes* was recognised in Canada by Coues in 1862. Whether or not their speciation is complete has been much disputed. Indeed if any

group of passerines presents frequently unstable gene flow, it has to be the redpolls. Given their status as mere samplers of the birds' farthest-flung eruptions and vagrancies, British observers should remain aware of the difficulties of making firm separations not just of the two forms of Arctics but also of the variable 'northwestern' birds that cross the North Atlantic from Greenland, Iceland and potentially the Nearctic. For more information on the complexities of tundra and fringe-taiga Redpolls, the recent flurry of papers are worth reading, including Riddington & Votier (1997), Reid & Riddington (1998), Votier *et al.* (2000), Pennington & Maher (2005) and Stevenson (2005). The last is a particularly fascinating and overt statement from the Outer Hebrides Recorder. It poses more questions than it finds answers, noting that there and in 'the Northern Isles... birds resembling all known forms can – and do – occur' and may even breed there. It comes as a surprise that the recent (2000–04) rejection rate for the species has been only 10%.

#### 'Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll' *C. h. hornemanni*

The first British record came from Whitburn, Co. Durham, on 24th April 1855. At least ten more were obtained or seen between 1883 and 1935, including nine shot in Shetland, on Fair Isle and Unst, on dates from 18th September to 12th November, and a second English bird near Spurn, East Yorkshire, on 25th February 1893. During the five and a half decades of BBRC reviews, long-held worries over the separation of the species from Mealy Redpoll *C. flammea* led to few and seemingly haphazard racial attributions. Indeed, after one on Fair Isle in 1950, the only other mentions of *hornemanni* until 1996 concerned a dead bird on Lewis on 8th April 1962, four in Kent and Norfolk in October 1972, one in Scilly in October 1977, two on Shetland in October 1980, one on Shetland in April 1987 and one on Orkney in November 1988, a total of only seven records featuring ten birds. Since 1996, attributions have been confirmed in four years; with a marked influx of at least ten in 2003 and another five in 2004, *hornemanni* has actually outnumbered definite *exilipes* by 17 to 8. Its recent localities and dates reflect strongly the occurrence pattern indicated by the early specimens, that of an irregular transatlantic waif usually appearing in the Northern Isles ahead of *exilipes* and only rarely then pitching down the east coast. Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll will continue to be vetted as a rarity.

#### 'Coue's Arctic Redpoll' *C. h. exilipes*

The first three British specimens were taken near Spurn in January 1894 and December 1898 (two), while the first Scottish bird came from Fair Isle in the autumn of 1900. The next eight came from the same areas and also from Norfolk and were dated from 22nd October to 4th January, in only five years from 1910 to 1945. For most of the BBRC epoch, definite records virtually evaporated, a trapped individual from Suffolk in November 1972 being the only bird listed by Naylor (1996) in the years up to 1993. In 1976, however, Sharrock & Sharrock opined that the predominant east-coast locations of the 35 Arctic Redpolls from 1958 to 1972 meant that 'most (modern) birds originated from northern Eurasia', a view supported by the frequent co-arrivals of Mealy Redpolls. Confident attributions to *exilipes* were made on Fair Isle in January and twice in May in 1993. Two autumns later a floodgate opened and along with thousands of Mealies, 431, later increased to 441, poured across the North Sea and into Britain (Riddington *et al.* 2000). No-one doubted that they were *exilipes*, since within north-west Europe, literally millions of redpolls erupted southwest in the autumn/winter of 1995/96. Curiously, since 1996, only eight definite attributions have been made. How many others were overlooked in the nine other 'great immigrations' of Mealies that occurred between 1829 and 1910 (*The Handbook*; Evans 1991) will never be known. Thus the British status of *exilipes* remains difficult to define; in most years, it may well be rarer than *hornemanni*.

An analysis of the indeterminate birds is pointless but, whichever race is involved, the Arctic Redpoll is always a delight. As Eagle Clarke wrote, particularly of *hornemanni*, 'In life these birds, especially the adults, appear to be almost entirely white and this fact, and their habit of puffing out their fluffy feathers, rendered them exceedingly pretty and conspicuous objects.' Like Brahms on occasion, the lethal collectors could emote.

South of its breeding limits in Europe, the Arctic Redpoll is again a bird of chance but *hornemanni* has reached Iceland, Heligoland, Sweden, The Netherlands, Belgium and France, while *exilipes* also strays through such maritime countries (notably The Netherlands) and reaches more frequently central and eastern Europe (notably Poland).



- Pennington, M., & Maher, M. 2005. Greenland, Iceland and Hornemann's Redpolls in Britain. *Birding World* 18: 66–78.
- Reid, J. M., & Riddington, R. 1998. Identification of Greenland and Iceland Redpolls. *Dutch Birding* 20: 261–269.
- Riddington, R., & Votier, S. 1997. Redpolls from Greenland and Iceland. *Birding World* 10: 147–149.
- , —, & Steele, J. 2000. The influx of redpolls into Western Europe, 1995/96. *Brit. Birds* 93: 59–67.
- Stevenson, A. 2005. Redpolls in the Outer Hebrides. *Birding World* 18: 124.
- Votier, S. C., Steele, J., Shaw, K. D., & Stoddart, A. M. 2000. Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni exilipes*: an identification review based on the 1995/96 influx. *Brit. Birds* 93: 68–84.

(Circumpolar Arctic, with European breeding range restricted to N Scandinavia. Race *C. h. exilipes* breeds on tundra of Arctic Eurasia, Alaska and Canada to Hudson Bay. Nominate race breeds Ellesmere and Baffin Island to N Greenland. Both races disperse S in winter, irregularly reaching NW Europe.)

## Two-barred Crossbill *Loxia leucoptera* (114, 112, 0)

2002 Shetland Vidlin, Mainland, ♂, 13th–19th July (M. S. Chapman *et al.*).

(Local resident within larch *Larix* sp. forests of N Eurasia from N Russia to E Siberia, reaching Sea of Okhotsk, and S to Baikal region. Irruptive dispersal leads to irregular breeding in Finland, and very occasionally in Sweden and Norway. Outside breeding season, dispersal occasionally reaches NW Europe. Nominate form breeds across N North America.)

## Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus* (0, 7, 4)

Kent Tankerton, Whitstable, ♂, 24th–25th May (G. J. A. Burton *et al.*). North Foreland, ♂, 9th June (F. Solly). Dungeness, ♂, 11th–13th June, photo (S. Davies *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 232).

Suffolk Landguard Point, first-summer ♂, 21st–26th May, photo (L. G. Woods *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 231; plate 35).

The Trumpeter Finch occupies an extensive range stretching from the Canary Islands through North Africa to southwest Asia, Pakistan and the extreme western deserts of India. The species inhabits the most desolate arid ravines, rocky slopes and stony uplands, though generally avoids extensive sand-dune habitat. Four races include the nominate *githagineus* from Egypt south to Sudan, *amantum* in the Canary Islands, *crassirostris* from Sinai and the Levant east (sporadically) through Arabia to southwest Asia, and *zedlitsi* in northwest Africa and, recently, southern Spain. All are generally regarded as resident but dispersive or nomadic, undergoing erratic movements which lead to small-scale changes of range, and sometimes local abundance in new areas one year, followed by complete absence in the next. The race *crassirostris* perhaps tolerates the most extreme climatic conditions, yet there is little evidence of large-scale movement or range extension, though some populations in Iran and



35. First-summer male Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus*, Landguard Point, Suffolk, May 2005.

Chris Galvin

Afghanistan are partial migrants, making local movements in winter to foothills and adjacent plains. Closer to home, *zedlitsi* has shown recent northward movement, becoming a breeding resident in Spain in 1971; perhaps it is no coincidence that that was also the year of the first two British records. The colonisation of Spain appears to be a recent event but it is possible that the species may have been previously overlooked in Spain's harsh terrain. Finlayson & Tomlinson (2003) reported that the Spanish birds return to North Africa in winter, but other reports suggest that the species is chiefly resident in Spain.

There appears to be no reason to suspect other than that *zedlitsi* is involved in British records. Since the species as a whole is erratically nomadic, the British experience of occasional clusters of records appears normal. In Europe as a whole there was a small-scale invasion in spring 2005; the collective number and timing of records surely dispel any notion that anything other than natural vagrancy is concerned. As well as the four British records between 21st May and 13th June, there was an unprecedented arrival of six birds to France (only four previous records) between 23rd April and 15th May; the fourth and fifth records for Sweden were found on 28th May; and a single at the mouth of the Besós River near Barcelona, Spain, on 29th April was well north of its usual range. In addition, the first for Switzerland was a male on 27th–29th April, and there were additional April records in Italy and Cyprus.

This year's British records, the first since 1992 and the first twitchable birds since the one at Church Norton in 1984, all involved males, as established by the bright red tones of their bills; the bill colour of females during the breeding season is pale brown to dull horn, often with a pink or yellow tinge. Ageing is more difficult, although the subdued pinkness in general and the lack of obvious grey tones to the head suggest that none was an adult male. Ageing is hampered by variation in the timing and extent of the post-juvenile moult. Most juveniles undergo a partial post-juvenile moult including head and body and some wing-coverts; however, some retain their juvenile primaries until the summer of their second calendar-year, while others renew the central and outer primaries, and a small proportion of birds undergo a complete moult. Whatever the reasons, the photographs do show individual differences among the four birds. The plumage of the Landguard bird was generally the dullest, this individual having the least worn tertials, and the pink largely restricted to the rump, with just a little on the wings and coverts. Both the Dungeness and Whitstable birds were brighter and more clearly pink, yet both of these had heavily worn tertials.

Finlayson, C., & Tomlinson, D. 2003. *Birds of Iberia*. Santana, Malaga.

(Largely resident from Canary Islands, SE Spain and deserts of N Africa east through Middle East to S Iran and Pakistan. Eastern populations in particular dispersive, some wintering east to deserts of NW India.)

## Yellow Warbler *Dendroica petechia* (0, 4, 1)



Shetland Garths Ness, Mainland, first-winter ♂, 15th–17th September, photo (R. M. Mellor *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 409; plate 36).

(Widespread breeder across North America from NW Alaska E to Newfoundland, S through Mexico and C America to N Peru and Galapagos. Northern populations migratory, wintering C Mexico to C Peru and N Brazil.)

**36.** First-winter male Yellow Warbler *Dendroica petechia*, Garths Ness, Shetland, September 2005.





Steve Young/Birdwatch

37. First-winter Blackpoll Warbler *Dendroica striata*, St Mary's, Scilly, October 2005.

### Blackpoll Warbler *Dendroica striata* (0, 33, 3)

Highland Glasnakille, Skye, first-winter, 4th October (R. D. Day, R. Macmillan).

Outer Hebrides Loch Druidibeg, South Uist, first-winter, 29th September (A. Stevenson *et al.*).

Scilly St Agnes, first-winter, 27th–30th September, photo (D. Page, D. Price *et al.*); same, St Mary's, 3rd October to 3rd November (per N. Hudson) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 410; plate 37).

(Breeds widely across North America from W Alaska E through Canada to Newfoundland, S to Maine in NE USA. Migrates widely through E USA to winter in South America from Panama to Chile and E Argentina.)

### Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos* (2, 42, 3)

Outer Hebrides Carinish, North Uist, ♀, 16th November (S. E. Duffield, B. Rabbitts).

Shetland Challister, Whalsay, first-winter, ♂, 4th–5th November, photo (J. L. Irvine *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 99: plate 28; plate 38).

Worcestershire New Farm, ♂, 15th–24th January, photo (G. Peplow *et al.*).

2004 Yorkshire, North Bampton, ♂, 10th–11th April (per *Birdwatch* magazine).

(Breeds temperate Russia from W Urals to upper Kolyma River, S to S Siberia, Mongolia, lower Amur valley and Sakhalin. Isolated population breeds Qinghai and Gansu, C China. Small, isolated wintering populations regular W Italy and C Israel. Otherwise winters S of breeding range from Turkestan E through Himalayan foothills to C and E China, N of Yangtze.)



Hugh Harrop

38. First-winter male Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*, Challister, Whalsay, Shetland, November 2005.



### Chestnut-eared Bunting *Emberiza fucata* (0, 1, 0)

2004 Shetland Fair Isle, first-winter ♂, 15th–20th October, photo (D. N. Shaw *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 97: plate 399).

Few birders would have imagined that Chestnut-eared Bunting would reach western Europe, and even D. I. M. Wallace's summary of predicted future Palearctic passerine vagrants (*Brit. Birds* 73: 388–397), which has proved to be remarkably intuitive, did not include this species. Fortunately, it was trapped, identified as being of the nominate form, which is only known to breed to the east of Lake Baikal, and aged as a first-winter. Its credentials were further enhanced by a strong supporting cast, which included a Rufous-tailed Robin *Luscinia sibilans* on Fair Isle on 23rd October, and an Eastern Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus coronatus* in Finland, also on 23rd. During its review of this remarkable record, BOURC considered the likelihood of it being an escape from captivity. They concluded that there was no known trade in captive birds at this time, and since the legitimate trade in wild birds from eastern Asia had then effectively dried up owing to protection measures set up in response to the outbreak of avian influenza in 2004, this would seem to rule out the possibility of it being an escape. An account of this remarkable bird will be published in *British Birds* in 2007.

(Nominate form breeds Baikal region, E to NE Mongolia and Russian Maritime Regions, NE China, Korean Peninsula and Japan. Northern populations migratory, wintering Taiwan and S China, south to N Thailand. Other races largely sedentary in W Himalayas and SE China.)

### Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* (21, 424, 6)

Angus & Dundee Windyhills, ♂, 28th–29th May, photo (R. A. Bramhall *et al.*).

Shetland Fair Isle, ♂, 8th May (J. M. Reid *et al.*); ♂, 13th June (M. D. Warren *et al.*). Baltasound, Unst, ♂, 22nd May (D. P. Hall, S. J. Minton, M. G. Pennington) (*Brit. Birds* 98: plate 233). Hoswick, Mainland, 24th–27th October, photo (W. F. & W. R. H. Peplow *et al.*) (plate 39).

Yorkshire, East Spurn, 15th–18th October, photo (I. D. Collins, R. J. Swales *et al.*).

First described by Pallas from Transbaikalia in 1776, this handsome bunting is still a much-prized tick. Its early British history began in the trappers' era and was boosted by the island collectors. Of 26 birds noted up to 1936 (*The Handbook*; Naylor 1996), only 17 survived later reviews but the first remained the bird trapped near Brighton, Sussex, on 23rd October 1867. The other 16 included a surprising male and female in Aberdeenshire in March 1905 and, in a remarkable forecast of its future main status, three in May and June, seven in September, four in October and one in November. Owing to the



39. Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*, Hoswick, Shetland, October 2005.

Second World War and its aftermath, there were only two more before 1949. Up to then, the sympatric Little Bunting *E. pusilla* had outnumbered Rustic almost four to one but both remained unknown in Wales and the southwest.

As the observatories grew in number, Rustic Buntings were found more regularly but given a small flood of Littles, they became outnumbered five to one. Both species reached Wales and Devon and Little also Scilly. By 1972, Sharrock & Sharrock (1976) were able to display annual records from 1962 but noted a definite decline in spite of mounting reports in Scilly and the first for Ireland. Similarly the trend in numbers of Littles stopped rising and they remained concentrated in Shetland. The ratio changed abruptly to less than two to one in favour of Little, and the latter became rare in spring.

In the next 13 years to 1985, and particularly from the mid 1970s, both Rustic and Little were found more frequently and the latter broke all previous bounds in 1984 when there were 41. Once again the ratio changed to over three to one in favour of Little. The relative numbers of the two species became really puzzling; although Little was colonising Norway and Sweden, its measured presence in Fennoscandia was no more than 1,300 pairs in 1988, by which year that region's Rustics numbered over 550,000 pairs after a dramatic expansion since 1897. From 1970, they had begun to breed in Norway, as near to Fair Isle as London is!

Looking in detail at the records of the two species for the last eight years of common BBRC review, from 1986 to 1993, it is clear that the dynamics behind their British occurrences are different. Rustic was far commoner in spring overshoots (43 cf. 22 Littles) and was found later (20% in June); it was far less numerous in autumn (73 cf. 203) with only one matching marked influx and had only just started to overwinter (from 1992 cf. from 1949). The overall ratio returned to two Littles to one Rustic but was still wildly out of kilter with the balance of their close breeding populations. In 1993, more Rustics were found than Littles for the first time ever (49 cf. 44). There was another surge in 1998, but whereas Littles became even more numerous into the 2000s, Rustics faltered and have averaged only six birds a year since 2002. Even though the population of Rustics in Fennoscandia has stopped growing or decreased – later estimates put it at around 300,000 pairs – it still outnumbers Little Bunting there by 40 to one.

A comparison of occurrence frequency between Rustic and Yellow-breasted Bunting *E. aureola* is even more perplexing. With now fewer than 100 pairs in its Finnish outpost (Laine 1996), the latter as a short-range 'reversed migrant' ought to be an absolute rarity. Yet, over its entire British history, one has appeared for every two Rustics. Like Greenish Warbler *P. trochiloides viridanus*, Yellow-breasted is a classic member of late August and September drifts to the Northern Isles and the east coast. Not for the first time this reviewer senses that it is to northwest Russia that we should look for the main source of these species and the Rustic Bunting.

Elsewhere in the Western Palearctic, Rustic Bunting has been found in 28 other countries. Its most extreme occurrences have come from Spitzbergen, Iceland, Iberia, Malta and through the Balkans to the Levant. Its overall reach is seven countries more than the Yellow-breasted but four less than the Little (BWP).

Although confusion with Little and Reed Buntings *E. schoeniclus* has occurred in autumn, field identification of Rustic Bunting is not difficult and is well covered in the latest guides. The recent (2000–04) rejection rate has been 5%. Vinicombe & Cottridge (1996) gave the bird a complex status, combining westward overshoots of Fennoscandian birds in late spring, 'reversed migration' in autumn, hidden wintering and withdrawal from such in early spring. With its twentieth-century expansion now stalled, will it maintain this occurrence pattern? And, if it is a typical 'reversed migrant', why is it so uncommon compared with Little and Yellow-breasted? Perhaps, like the similarly abundant Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*, most do know where to go in winter.

Laine, L. J. 1996. *Suomalainen Lintu-opas*. Helsinki Media, Helsinki.

(Breeds in boreal forest mires of N Eurasia from Sweden and Finland, E across N Russia to easternmost Siberia and Kamchatka, and S to Baikal region. Migrates SE to winter in E China, Korean Peninsula and S Japan.)

## Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* (8, 219, 1)

Shetland Foula, first-winter, 27th September (P. R. French, A. R. Mainwood *et al.*).

(European range restricted to small and declining population in C Finland, centred on Gulf of Bothnia. To E, breeds widely across Russia and Siberia to Kamchatka, S to NE China and NE Hokkaido. Winters locally from E Nepal through Himalayan foothills to NE India, and widely throughout SE Asia.)



## Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* (7, 170, 1)

Argyll Kiloran, Colonsay, ♂, 12th June (M. Davison, D. C. Jardine *et al.*).

1998 Orkney North Ronaldsay, first-winter, 27th–28th September (M. Gray *et al.*).

2001 Shetland Fair Isle, ♀, 22nd September (J. K. Andrews, P. R. French, D. N. Shaw *et al.*).

(Breeds from C Italy to Greece, Turkey, N Iraq and W Iran, N through Caucasus to Ukraine and S Russia. Winters in W and C India.)

## Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus* (0, 20, 1)

Outer Hebrides Ardmhor plantation, Barra, first-winter ♂, 8th October (K. Gillon *et al.*).

Yet another reward for the pioneering birders of Barra. This was only the second Scottish record, following a first-winter male at Newton, North Uist, on 7th–8th October 1983, which died in care on the last date. Scilly accounts for the majority of the British records and, surprisingly, there are still no records from Cornwall or Shetland (and there is only one accepted record for Iceland). Surely it will not be long before a ringer in Cornwall has the pleasure of finding out how much pain this species can inflict on one finger!

(Breeds C Canada to Nova Scotia and through mid-west and NE USA to Maryland. Migrates through E USA to winter from C Mexico through C America to N South America.)

## Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus* (0, 25, 1)

Shetland Foula, 30th September to 4th October, photo (K. B. Shepherd, N. D. & P. J. Wright, R. D. Wynn *et al.*).

Another good find from Foula. A typical date and although most records are in the southwest, this is the fifth for Shetland.

(Breeds widely across S Canada and N USA, S to NE California and New Jersey. Winters Peru to S Brazil and N Argentina.)

## Appendix I. List of records not accepted

This list contains all current records not accepted after circulation to the Committee. It does not include a) those withdrawn by the observer(s) after discussion with the Hon. Secretary; b) those which, even if circulated, were not attributed by the observer(s) to any definite species; c) those mentioned in 'Recent reports' in *British Birds* if full details were unobtainable; or d) certain escapes.

In the vast majority of cases, the record was not accepted because we were not convinced that the identification was fully established; only in a very few cases were we satisfied that a mistake had been made.

2005 Black Brant Pagham Harbour, West Sussex, 5th February. Redhead Kenfig, Glamorgan, 24th September. Ferruginous Duck Blithfield Reservoir, Staffordshire, 24th and 25th March. White-billed Diver Cummingston, Moray & Nairn, 3rd May. Zino's/Fea's Petrel Atwick, East Yorkshire, 20th July; Filey, North Yorkshire, 20th July; Sheringham, Norfolk, 8th August; Filey, North Yorkshire, 11th August. Cape Verde Shearwater *Calonectris edwardsii* Rumps Point, Cornwall, 3rd June. North Atlantic Little Shearwater Fife Ness, Fife, 7th September; Rumps Point, Cornwall, 28th September. Wilson's Storm-petrel 10 km W of St Mary's, Scilly, 17th August. Frigatebird sp. Peterhead, Northeast Scotland, 26th November. Squacco Heron Peppermill Dam, Fife, 24th May. Great White Egret Hayling Oysterbeds, Hampshire, 10th May; Taw Estuary, Devon, 26th May; Dolgellau, Merionethshire, 28th May; Erme Estuary, Devon, 8th June. Black Stork Lindfield, Sussex, 14th June. Black Kite Otter Estuary, Devon, 21st January; Yarpole, Herefordshire, 1st April; Trundigar, Orkney, 29th April; Shelley, West Yorkshire, 2nd May; Bishop Monkton Ings, North Yorkshire, 8th May; Stainton, South Yorkshire, 14th May; Leiston, Suffolk, 16th May; Fiddler's Ferry, Cheshire, 21st May; Murcar, Northeast Scotland, 27th May; Galmpton, Devon, 31st May; Frensham Common, Surrey, 2nd June; Longwood Warren, Hampshire, 17th June; Low Barden Reservoir, North Yorkshire, 21st June; Strete, Devon, 28th June; Hatfield, Hertfordshire, 7th September. Pallid Harrier Strathnairn, Highland, 8th May; Fellgate, Durham, 28th May. Red-footed Falcon Shipley, West Sussex, 29th January; Storrington, West Sussex, 9th May; Fraithorpe, East Yorkshire, 22nd May; Minsmere, Suffolk, 4th June; Abberton Reservoir, Essex, 20th



August. **Sora** Brogborough Lake, Bedfordshire, 4th January. **Allen's Gallinule** *Porphyryla alleni* St Mary's, Scilly, 17th October. **Collared Pratincole** Llanfaelog, Anglesey, 29th June. **American Golden Plover** Porthgarra, Cornwall, 27th October. **Least Sandpiper** Keyhaven, Hampshire, 9th September. **White-rumped Sandpiper** Thurlestone, Devon, 5th September; Southwold, Suffolk, 28th October. **Baird's Sandpiper** Goldcliff, Gwent, 6th September; Spurn, East Yorkshire, 11th September. **Broad-billed Sandpiper** Titchwell, Norfolk, 19th July. **Long-billed Dowitcher** Goldcliff, Gwent, 20th–27th March; Skinburness, Cumbria, 22nd September. **Marsh Sandpiper** Swalecliffe, Kent, 30th April; Abbots Hall, Essex, 25th September. **Great Black-headed Gull** *Larus ichthyæetus* Cemlyn Bay, Anglesey, 18th July. **Laughing Gull** Fishguard Harbour, Pembrokeshire, 21st November; Ayr, Ayrshire, 19th December. **Bonaparte's Gull** Caswell Bay, Gower, 7th February; Weybourne, Norfolk, 16th November. **Audouin's Gull** Blakeney Point, Norfolk, 25th May; St Ouen's, Jersey, 31st May. **Ross's Gull** Hunstanton, Norfolk, 19th October. **Gull-billed Tern** Abbotsbury, Dorset, 7th June; Whitburn, Co. Durham, 27th June; Cotswold Water Park, Gloucestershire, 3rd July. **Caspian Tern** Hook-with-Warsash, Hampshire, 27th June. **White-winged Black Tern** Stanford Reservoir, Leicestershire, 27th August. **Eurasian Scops Owl** *Otus scops* Hythe, Kent, 15th July. **Snowy Owl** Loch Thormaidd, Caithness, 10th March. **Alpine Swift** Llandudno, Caernarfonshire, 24th March; Pentire Head, Cornwall, 27th March; Maldon, Essex, 11th October. **Pallid Swift** St Martin's, Scilly, 28th October; Littlehampton, Sussex, 30th October; Newquay, Cornwall, 30th October; Cley, Norfolk, 31st October. **Little Swift** Hythe, Kent, 14th July. **Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* Frensham Great Pond, Surrey, 19th May. **Red-rumped Swallow** Netherfield, Nottinghamshire, 19th June. **Olive-backed Pipit** Fair Isle, Shetland, 16th October; Fair Isle, 3rd November. **Red-throated Pipit** Greenabella Marsh, Cleveland, 1st October; Barnes, Greater London, 10th October; Sandy Point, Hampshire, 13th October. **Citrine Wagtail** Farne Islands, Northumberland, 10th September; Cley, Norfolk, 13th September. **Thrush Nightingale** Monteviot, Borders, 7th May. **Red-flanked Bluetail** Girton, Cambridgeshire, 26th June. **Dusky Thrush** *Turdus naumanni* Dalbeattie, Dumfries & Galloway, 17th October. **Dark-throated Thrush** Southwell, Dorset, 20th October; Great Broughton, Cumbria, 21st November. **American Robin** St Mary's, Scilly, 18th October. **Blyth's Reed Warbler** St Agnes, Scilly, 11th October. **Subalpine Warbler** St Mary's, Scilly, 19th October. **Sardinian Warbler** Farlington Marshes, Hampshire, 17th June. **Greenish Warbler** Cotswold Water Park, Gloucestershire, 2nd September; Stiffkey, Norfolk, 12th September. **Arctic Warbler** St Agnes, Scilly, 8th September. **Hume's Warbler** Weybourne, Norfolk, 11th December. **Dusky Warbler** Lannacombe, Devon, 15th October. **Collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicollis* Amlwch, Anglesey, 1st October. **Parrot Crossbill** *Loxia pytyopsittacus* Swining, Mainland, Shetland, 19th October.

2004 **Wilson's Storm-petrel** Workington, Cumbria, 18th and 21st September. **Great White Egret** St Mary's Marshes, Kent, 10th July; Rock, Cornwall, 11th July; Allhallows, Kent, 12th October; St Mary's Marshes, Kent, 15th November. **Black Brant Reculver**, Kent, 16th March. **Redhead** Uskmouth, Gwent, 2nd May. **Ferruginous Duck** Hen Reedbeds, Suffolk, 2nd August. **Black Kite** Orcombe Point, Devon, 5th September. **Red-footed Falcon** Hintlesham, Suffolk, 22nd August. **American Coot** St Agnes, Scilly, 30th November. **White-winged Black Tern** Priory Country Park, Bedfordshire, 2nd May; Titchfield Haven, Hampshire, 26th September. **Pallid Swift** Bawdsey, Suffolk, 21st October; Chapel Point, Lincolnshire, 24th October; Hunstanton, Norfolk, 29th October; Spurn, East Yorkshire, 29th October; Bishopstone, Kent, 30th October. **Little Swift** Southampton, Hampshire, 6th February. **Tree Swallow** *Tachycineta bicolor* Wick Hams, Dorset, 31st October. **Red-rumped Swallow** Hensol Lake, Glamorgan, 30th April; Coll, Argyll, 4th May. **Asian Desert Warbler** *Sylvia nana* California, Norfolk, 22nd October. **Greenish Warbler** Beachy Head, West Sussex, 14th June. **Yellow-breasted Bunting** Spey Bay, Moray & Nairn, 20th September 2004.

2003 **Ferruginous Duck** Abbotsbury, Dorset, 1st and 11th December. **Great White Egret** Fiddler's Ferry, Cheshire, 13th September; Malltraeth, Anglesey, 6th November. **Black Kite** Windmill Farm, Cornwall, 11th July. **Red-rumped Swallow** Meece Brook, Staffordshire, 30th April.

2001 **Black Kite** South Woodford, Greater London, 9th June. **Alpine Swift** Charmouth, Dorset, 18th February.

1994 White-winged Black Tern Rutland Water, Leicestershire, 14th October.

1992 Red-throated Pipit Swalecliffe, Kent, 29th September.

1991 Snowy Owl Breydon Water, Norfolk, 22nd March.

1990 Black Scoter Farnham Gravel-pit, North Yorkshire, 28th April. Two-barred Crossbill Sandringham, Norfolk, 30th September.

1987 Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* Braco, Perth & Kinross, 6th July.

1975 Pechora Pipit Minsmere, Suffolk, 27th April.

1964 Upland Sandpiper Minsmere, Suffolk, 24th September. Alpine Swift Whalley, Lancashire, 10th–11th July.

## Appendix 2. List of records not accepted but identification proved

### Ross's Goose *Anser rossii* (0, 8, 0)

2001 Hampshire Farlington Marshes, 29th–31st October (R. A. Chapman, J. Crook).

(Breeds in scattered colonies on tundra of Canadian Arctic, from Perry River region of Northwest Territories to N Manitoba, including Southampton Island, E to N Ontario. Most migrate across C USA to wintering grounds in S USA, with increasing numbers regular on Atlantic seaboard, and N Mexico.)

### White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala* (0, 19, 0)

Cleveland Saltholme, adult ♂, 29th March to 7th April (J. Grieveson *et al.*), returning bird from 2004 (*Brit. Birds* 98: 693).

Hertfordshire Hilfield Park Reservoir, 13th, 18th February, 19th March, intermittently 21st August to 4th January 2006; presumed returning bird from 2004 (below).

1999 Cambridgeshire Godmanchester, juvenile, 4th September. Correct year is 1999, not 1998 as previously published (*Brit. Birds* 98: 693).

2001 Oxfordshire Farmoor Reservoir, ♀, 3rd November, photo (N. J. Hallam *et al.*).

2004 Hertfordshire Hilfield Park Reservoir, adult ♂, 12th–30th January, photo (A. E. Blake, S. Murray *et al.*); same, 23rd December to 31st January 2005.

(Fragmented breeding range across steppe region of S Palearctic. Small resident or dispersive European population now confined to SC Spain. More widespread in Asia, from C Turkey, E through C Asian steppes of S Russia to E Kazakhstan and W Xinjiang province, NW China. Asian breeders winter on wetlands to S of breeding range from Israel to Iran and Punjab, Pakistan.)

He



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# Eastern promise:

## the arrival of far-eastern passerine vagrants in autumn

Andrew H. J. Harrop



Alan Harris

An Eastern Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus coronatus* in Finland in the second half of October 2004 was discovered on the same day as a Rufous-tailed Robin *Luscinia sibilans* on Fair Isle, Shetland, and eight days after a Chestnut-eared Bunting *Emberiza fucata*, also on Fair Isle. The two previous Western Palearctic records of Eastern Crowned Warbler were both more than two weeks earlier.

### Introduction and methods

For many active birders in Britain, some of the most exciting days of the year are those between early September and mid November when conditions suggest that there may be an arrival of migrants on the east coast. Among all the birds from Fennoscandia and beyond, there might be a vagrant from Siberia. Compared with some Nearctic passerine vagrants, which cross four time zones with the advantage of following winds, East Palearctic vagrants have even greater mystique because they may have crossed nine or ten time zones (more than 10,000 km) in more variable weather conditions. In some cases (for example, Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*), their natural occurrence is now accepted and even predictable. In the cases

of what are potentially the rarest (and therefore most exciting) birds, however, the euphoria of discovery is sometimes overcast by the spectre of the cagebird trade.

Taken individually, it is sometimes difficult to feel confident about the origin of birds which may be here either as exceptionally rare vagrants or as a result of trade. Taken together, however, there are now sufficient records of some of the rarest East Palearctic passerine vagrants in the Western Palearctic for patterns to be discernible. Where these patterns are consistent with the species' normal migration, the case for natural vagrancy seems very strong. As shown below, the occurrence patterns both of regularly occurring species which are not suspected of having been in trade and of some of



Alan Vittery



Alan Vittery

**40 & 41.** Daurian Starling *Sturnus sturninus*, with Common Starlings *S. vulgaris* (right), Durness, Highland, September 1998. This bird was closely followed by two Red-flanked Bluetails *Tarsiger cyanurus* (in Scotland and northeast England). The date of the record also accords with normal movements in east Asia.

the rarest species do correspond with migration periods in east Asia. It seems unlikely that the arrival of birds which have been in trade would consistently match these patterns, and in many cases there is no evidence that the species involved have been in trade.

Although it is difficult to form a full or clear picture of the extent of the cagebird trade, there are clues. TRAFFIC (1998) reported that the main European destinations of wildlife from the Russian Far East are Germany, Italy and France, while Lau *et al.* (undated) found that from Hong Kong the birds imported to European countries are mainly finches (Estrildidae and Fringillidae), leiothrixes *Leiothrix*, Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis*, bulbuls (Pycnonotidae), flycatchers (Tyrannidae, Bombycillidae and Muscicapidae), munias (Estrildidae) and to a lesser extent robins, chats and thrushes (Turdidae). From a British perspective, therefore, neither the balance of species involved nor the fact that birds imported into central Europe would be expected to migrate south in autumn provides support for the argument that far-eastern 'vagrants' have arrived here as a result of trade.

### Previous work

Migration and vagrancy theories are not new. Gätke (1895) included extensive discussions of migration in his work. Among other things, he was impressed by the distance and velocity sometimes involved in migration and calculated that some Richard's Pipits *Anthus richardi* arrived on Heligoland, off the German coast, only about two months after they had hatched.

More recent authors have emphasised factors including the effect of the earth's magnetic field (Berthold 2001) and the impact of the easterly airflow along the southern flank of the Siberian anticyclone (Elkins 1983). It is likely that multiple factors are involved; the limitations of simple, though useful, theories like reverse migration (Vinicombe & Cottridge 1996) were emphasised by Gilroy & Lees (2003), who considered that genetic abnormalities may be a cause of the most exceptional vagrancies.

That vagrancy from east Asia occurs is not in question, and in most cases there are far more birds in the wild which may occur as vagrants than there are in trade. Nonetheless, trade from China and other parts of Asia has resulted in significant numbers of East Palearctic passerines being imported into Europe. The difficulties in record assessment caused by this trade were mentioned by Parkin & Shaw (1994) and analysed by Parkin & Knox (1994), though they did not take account of migration strategies and some other relevant factors. This paper aims to add data about migration strategies to the picture.

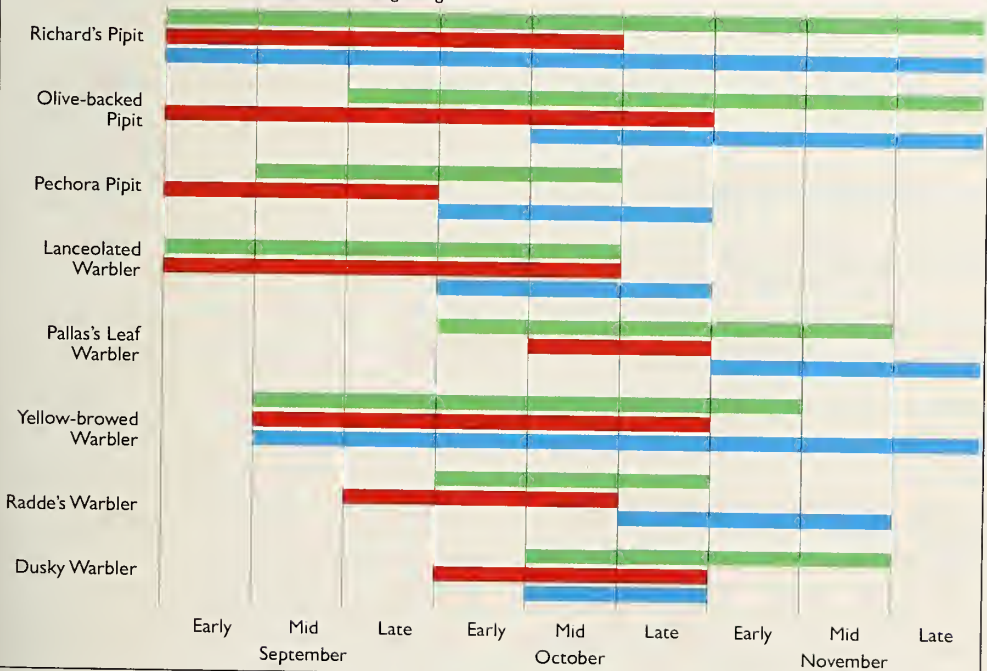
Since the work of McClure (1974), relatively few data from east Asia were available for comparative purposes until Williams (2000) and Carey *et al.* (2001) published findings from Beidaihe and Hong Kong respectively. Beidaihe lies on the Bay of Bohai, almost due east of Beijing (China), at a similar latitude to Madrid (Spain), while Hong Kong's position north of the South China Sea is at a similar latitude to the Western Sahara. Both lie on one of the main east Asian

**Table 1.** Autumn migration periods of some regularly occurring passerine vagrants from Asia. These summary data are derived from Dymond *et al.* (1989), Williams (2000) and Carey *et al.* (2001). Some extreme dates have been omitted for the purposes of this comparison.

Species	Britain & Ireland	Beidaihe	Hong Kong
Richard's Pipit <i>Anthus richardi</i>	early Sep to Dec; peak end Sep to end Oct	mid Aug to mid Oct; peak Sep	early Sep onwards; peak mid Oct
Olive-backed Pipit <i>A. hodgsoni</i>	late Sep to Nov	Sep to Oct; peak late Sep	mid Oct onwards; peak late Nov
Pechora Pipit <i>A. gustavi</i>	mid Sep to mid Oct	Sep (especially third week)	few records, mainly Oct
Lanceolated Warbler <i>Locustella lanceolata</i>	early Sep to mid Oct	Sep to mid Oct; peak end Sep	predominantly October
Pallas's Leaf Warbler <i>Phylloscopus proregulus</i>	early Oct to mid Nov	mid to end Oct; peak mid Oct	early Nov onwards
Yellow-browed Warbler <i>Ph. inornatus</i>	mid Sep to early Nov	mid Sep to end Oct	from mid Sep onwards
Radde's Warbler <i>Ph. schwarzi</i>	October	late Sep to mid Oct	last week Oct to third week Nov
Dusky Warbler <i>Ph. fuscatus</i>	mid Oct to mid Nov	Oct	distinct peak last two weeks Oct

**Table 1. Summary**

■ Britain & Ireland  
■ Beidaihe  
■ Hong Kong



flyways, and bird migration has been sufficiently well studied here for meaningful comparisons with data from Britain and the Western Palearctic to be possible.

The data in tables 1 and 2 compare the

migration periods of Palearctic migrants in east Asia, at Beidaihe and in Hong Kong, with dates of records in the Western Palearctic. Several variables need to be taken into account when interpreting the data (most notably normal

**Table 2.** Western Palearctic autumn records (arrival dates) of very rare passerine vagrants from east Asia up to the end of 2005. This table places Western Palearctic records in the context of autumn migration patterns at Beidaihe and Hong Kong, compared with what is known of status in trade. \* denotes extreme dates omitted; \*\* denotes known in trade but scarce or numbers unquantified.

Species	Western Palearctic autumn records	Beidaihe	Hong Kong	Trade
Siberian Blue Robin <i>Luscinia cyane</i>	27/10/1975, 18/10/2000, 23/10/2000, 2/10/2001	early Sep to mid Oct; peak early Sep	early Sep to early Oct; peak late Sep	**
Rufous-tailed Robin <i>L. sibilans</i>	23/10/2004	early to mid Oct; distinct peak in second week	from mid Oct, peak mid Nov	**
Gray's Grasshopper Warbler <i>Locustella fasciolata</i>	26/9/1913, 25/9/1955	second half Sep		
Thick-billed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus aedon</i>	Six records between 14/9 and 11/10 *	Aug to mid Oct; peak mid Sep	late Sep to end Oct	
Eastern Crowned Warbler <i>Phylloscopus coronatus</i>	4/10/1843, 30/9/2002, 23/10/2004	late Aug to end Sep; peak Aug/early Sep	mid Aug to end Oct; peak early Sep	
Two-barred Greenish Warbler <i>Ph. trochiloides plumbeitarsus</i>	Five records between 17/9 and 27/10 *	early Sep to mid Oct; peak early Oct	from late Sep; peak mid Oct	
Brown Flycatcher <i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>	24/9/1959, 27/9/1986 *	Aug to mid Oct; peak late Aug/early Sep	from early Sep; peak late Sep to third week Oct	
Mugimaki Flycatcher <i>Ficedula mugimaki</i>	16/11/1991	first half Oct	from mid Oct; peak third week Nov	**
Daurian Starling <i>Sturnus sturninus</i>	29/9/1985, 24/9/1998, 11/10/2005 *	late Aug/ early Sep	mid Sep to late Oct	Thousands in trade in Asia (Shepherd 2006)
Pallas's Rosefinch <i>Carpodacus roseus</i>	12/10/1987; also Oct/Dec 1850	end Oct to mid Nov		Frequent in trade
Chestnut-eared Bunting <i>Emberiza fucata</i>	15/10/2004	late Aug to late Oct; peak early to mid Sep	from mid Oct	
Yellow-browed Bunting <i>E. chrysophrys</i>	Seven records between 12/10 and 23/10	early Sep to early Nov; peak early Oct	from second week Oct; peak mid Nov	**
Chestnut Bunting <i>E. rutila</i>	5/11/1937, 13/10/1974, 10/10/1987, 2/9/1994, 4/9/2002, 30/9/2002	second week Sep to end Oct	mid Oct to mid Dec	Frequent in trade
Black-faced Bunting <i>E. spodocephala</i>	Seven records between 12/10 and 16/11	late Sep to mid Oct	end Oct to early Dec	**
Pallas's Reed Bunting <i>E. pallasi</i>	29/9/1976, 17/9/1981, 17/10/1991	early Oct to end Nov	8 Nov to 14 Dec (three records)	

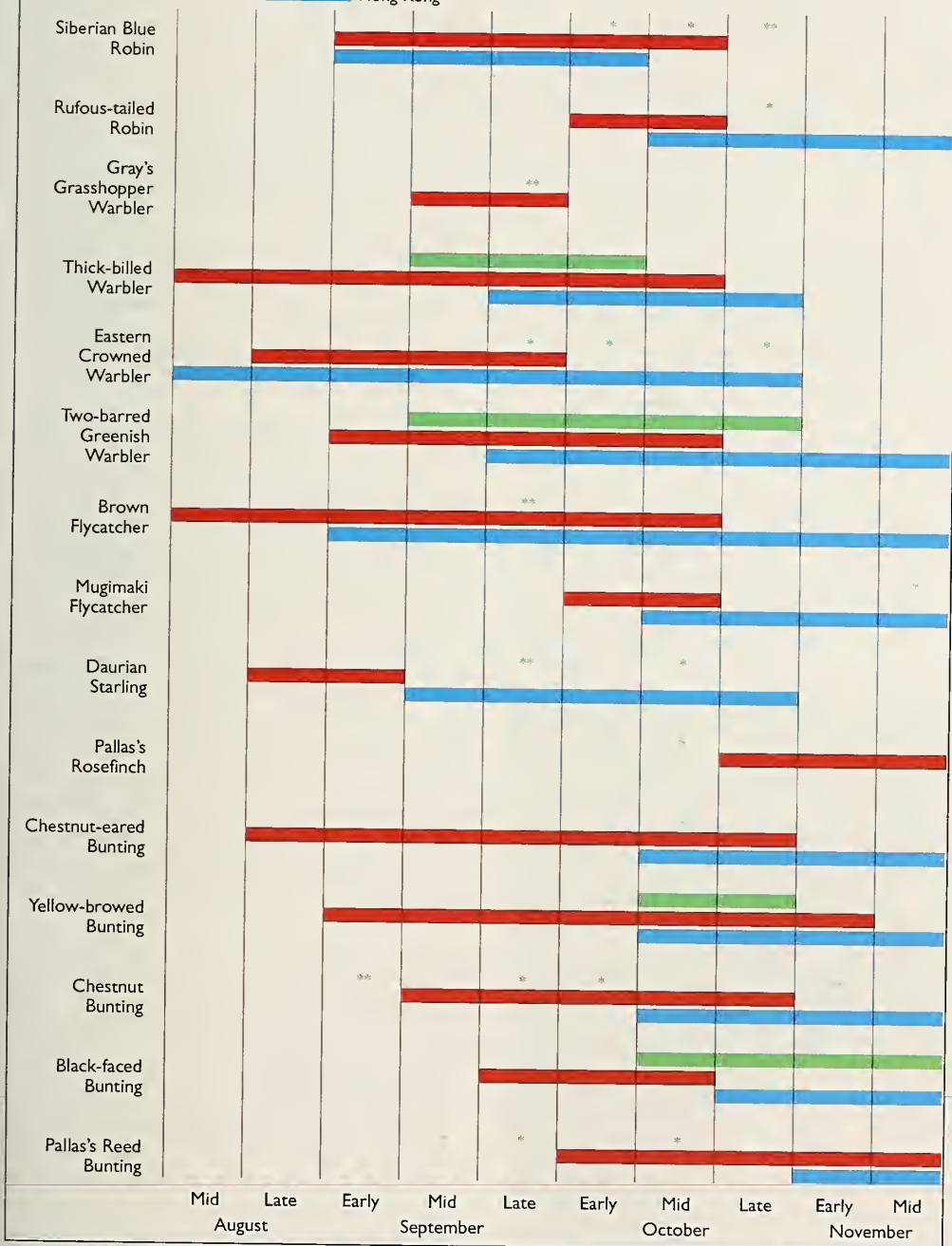
breeding and wintering distribution, which in some cases is poorly documented; see examples in figs. 1 & 2, p. 110). Nonetheless, what is striking is how arrivals of vagrants which have travelled farther than birds on conventional routes tend to mirror normal movements in date rather than being significantly later.

Although it is difficult to be sure about the reasons, it is tempting to speculate that since birds heading in the 'wrong' direction will experience lower temperatures and longer nights (as opposed to the 'expected' higher temperatures and shorter nights), this may add impetus and dissuade them from taking prolonged



**Table 2.** Summary

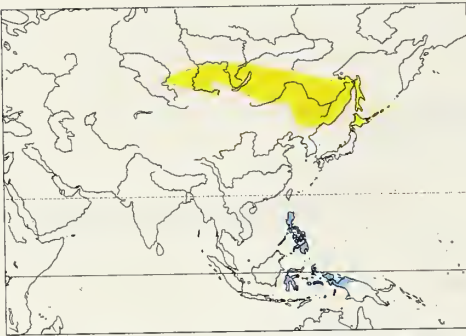
■ Western Palearctic autumn records  
■ Beidaihe  
■ Hong Kong



stopovers. This seems to be true of both nocturnal migrants and species such as pipits *Anthus* and buntings which also migrate by day.

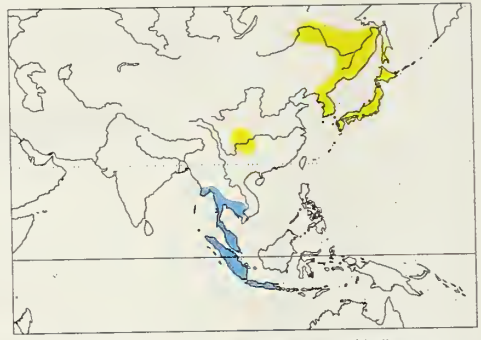
Most of the species in table 1, which on average have less far to travel than those in table 2, arrive in Britain & Ireland at about the same time as normal passage through Beidaihe

begins, though passage of Richard's Pipits, Yellow-browed *Ph. inornatus* and Dusky Warblers *Ph. fuscatus* also begins in Hong Kong at a similar time. Most of the far-eastern species in table 2, however, appear to reach the Western Palearctic at about the same time as birds arrive in Hong Kong, with the exceptions of Gray's



**Fig. 1.** Migration of Gray's Grasshopper Warblers *Locustella fasciolata* in autumn is rapid; birds leave the breeding areas in late August/early September, and arrive in the wintering areas from September. The two September records from the Western Palearctic demonstrate that long-range vagrancy by this species is similarly rapid.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella fasciolata*, and Yellow-browed *Emberiza chrysophrys* and Pallas's Reed Buntings *E. pallasi*, which have Western Palearctic records more closely matching their movements through Beidaihe. All the species listed have autumn records from the Western Palearctic which correspond in timing with their normal movements, though Siberian Blue Robin *Luscinia cyane* is unusual in



**Fig. 2.** Eastern Crowned Warblers *Phylloscopus coronatus* leave the breeding areas during the second half of August, and migration continues through September into October. This species is locally abundant in southeast Russia, the most likely origin of vagrants to the Western Palearctic.

that the majority of its discovery dates in the Western Palearctic are later than its normal movements in east Asia.

The extraordinary 21,000-km autumn migration of Northern Wheatears *Oenanthe oenanthe* which breed in Alaska and cross Asia and the Middle East to winter in Africa south of the Sahara is a reminder of what some relatively small birds are capable of. There can no longer be any reasonable doubt that some far-eastern species have occurred naturally in the Western Palearctic although, as demonstrated by Knox (1993), birds of captive origin may sometimes appear to have occurred naturally unless subjected to critical scrutiny. Data about migration strategies presented here may be helpful in resolving some of the more difficult cases.

### Case studies

It is interesting to consider three species not yet admitted to the British List: Eastern Crowned Warbler *Ph. coronatus*, Daurian Starling *Sturnus sturninus* and Chestnut Bunting *E. rutila*. Unlike some of the other species listed in table 2 (cf. Tove 1988), these three have not yet been recorded in western North America. Although there are not yet any British records of the warbler, the three Western Palearctic records fall within the species' normal migration period in Hong Kong and this species is not known in trade. There is no reason to believe that they did not arrive naturally. The starling is more problematic, because although there are Western Palearctic records (including one British) which fall within the species' normal migration period in Hong Kong, there are also records outside



**42.** Adult female Chestnut Bunting *Emberiza rutila*, Fair Isle, Shetland, September 2002. Although this individual and another adult female in Shetland (Out Skerries, in 1994) arrived on closely similar dates in early September, their arrival was somewhat earlier than would be expected on the basis of observed migration periods in east Asia.

Deryk Shaw

this period and the species is frequent in trade. The bunting does have Western Palearctic records which fall within its normal migration period in Hong Kong, but the two British records (in Shetland in the first week of September) are arguably less convincing because they occurred significantly earlier (albeit on closely similar dates, just one week earlier than the beginning of autumn migration through Beidaihe), and both involved adults. This species is also frequent in trade, and the majority of British records are spring records, quite unlike the usual pattern of far-eastern vagrants, whose autumn records far outnumber those in spring.

In conclusion, autumn arrivals in western Europe of eastern passerine vagrants which have travelled farther than birds on conventional routes tend to mirror their normal movements (in terms of timing); they therefore occur earlier than might be expected based on simple calculations of their normal speed and distance of movement. Those records which accord with this pattern deserve serious consideration.

#### Acknowledgments

Josep del Hoyo kindly allowed us to reproduce the two maps from *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, and Amy Chernasky at Lynx provided technical assistance.

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## Announcement

### *Bird Photograph of the Year 2007*

As always, this competition, established in 1976, seeks to recognise the best and/or the most scientifically interesting bird photographs. Preference is given to photographs taken in the Western Palearctic (Europe, North Africa and the Middle East), but those of species on the Western Palearctic List taken anywhere in the world are also eligible. Up to three images, each taken during the previous year (in this case 2006), may be submitted by each photographer. As in the past three years, both transparencies and digital images are acceptable. For full details of the rules (essential for those who wish to submit digital

photos) and this year's sponsorship, visit our website ([www.britishbirds.co.uk/bpy.htm](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk/bpy.htm)), or write to Peter Kennerley (BPY), 16 Coppice Close, Melton, Suffolk IP12 1RX, e-mail [peterkennerley@onetel.net](mailto:peterkennerley@onetel.net)

In addition, prizes will be awarded for the best digiscoped entry and the best entry received from a young photographer, aged below 26 (please state your age if you are entering in the latter category).

The closing date for entries will be 25th March 2007 and, as in previous years, the winning entries will be exhibited at the British Birdwatching Fair in August, where the awards will be presented.



# History of the Wood Sandpiper as a breeding bird in Britain

Kenna Chisholm



Ben Green

**ABSTRACT** Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola* are rare breeding birds in Britain, where they are restricted to the northern half of Scotland. Birds have been recorded breeding annually in Scotland since 1959; the total number of pairs has ranged between one and 21, while the number of sites occupied each year has varied from one to 12. The total number of occupied sites during this period is between 47 and 50, with nine new sites having been discovered since 1998. This paper draws together all available records of Wood Sandpiper breeding in Britain, including those dating back to the mid 1800s, and presents a summary of its current status as a breeding species. In Scotland, the number of spring migrants is positively correlated with the number of breeding pairs, and it is suggested that abnormally cool spring temperatures, or easterly winds, may encourage more Wood Sandpipers to remain in Scotland to breed. The possible effects of climate change on this small population are discussed briefly.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* is an abundant summer visitor to the marshes and forest bogs of northern Europe and Asia, where it breeds widely across Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. Hage-meijer & Blair (1997) estimated the European

breeding population to be in the region of 1.2-million breeding pairs. In Europe away from its breeding stronghold, however, numbers have declined, mainly because of wetland destruction and/or degradation, and it no longer breeds in Iceland, Poland or Germany (Tucker & Heath

1994; Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). As a breeding bird in Britain, the Wood Sandpiper is extremely rare and restricted to the northern half of Scotland, where birds have nested annually since 1959.

In the northern parts of their breeding range, Wood Sandpipers inhabit mainly forest bogs and wet marshes on tundra. Farther south, they regularly use large wet meadows, lake shores, and riverbanks in heather *Calluna vulgaris* moorland for nesting, but they will also nest in clearings in pine *Pinus* or birch *Betula* forest. Typically, the nest is located on the ground, where four eggs are laid in a scrape lined with coarse grasses among open vegetation. Occasionally they will use an old nest in a tree (Ferguson-Lees 1971; Kirchner 1978), disused Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* and Redwing *T. iliacus* nests being most favoured, but never as regularly as Green Sandpipers *Tringa ochropus* do. In Scotland, however, nests have been found mostly in wet bogs, and occasionally in dry heath and forest clearings. No tree nests have been reported.

After their return to breeding sites in late April or early May, Wood Sandpipers are particularly vocal when establishing their territory, with both males and females singing a fluted song. Once the eggs are laid, the birds are typically extremely shy and difficult to observe. If they produce chicks, the adults will vigorously scold anyone crossing their territory, either 'chipping' and calling from nearby perches or performing a high song-flight (Nethersole-Thompson & Nethersole-Thompson 1986).

### Sources of information

This paper summarises the results of an analysis of all the available breeding records of Wood Sandpiper in Britain up to 2004, including historical records dating back to the 1800s. Data on breeding Wood Sandpipers in Britain was provided by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP), which has collated breeding records since 1972. Additional records were collected

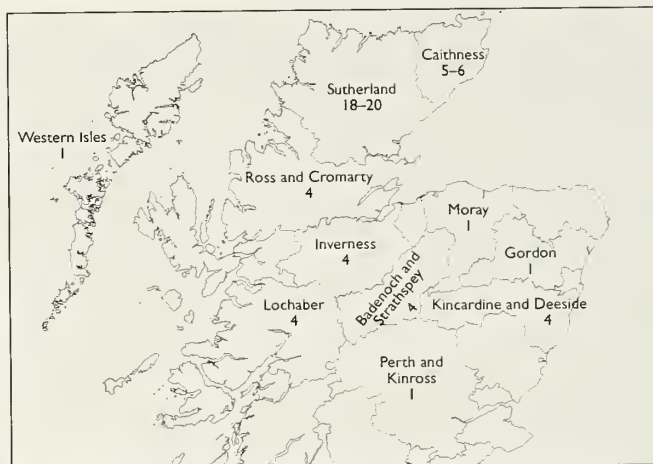


Bozena Kalejta-Summers

43. It is a rare treat to come across a breeding Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* in Britain, since the population is small and restricted to the northern half of Scotland. Birds arrive on their breeding grounds in late April or early May; this photo was taken in Scotland in June 2006.

from county avifaunas, annual bird reports and relevant publications and texts, sourced primarily through the Alexander Library at Oxford University. County Recorders and individuals known to have recorded Wood Sandpipers during the breeding season were also approached for information.

Breeding attempts by Wood Sandpipers that are documented in regional and county bird reports are included here. It would have been beyond the scope of this paper to follow up all these records to establish whether the birds' behaviour suggested breeding, and whether they had been seen in suitable habitat at the right time of year. However, if records referred to singing birds, they were traced back to the source where possible, and the details were confirmed. This was also done in those instances where sourced records indicating a possible or probable breeding attempt were accompanied by conflicting notes. No details of breeding sites are mentioned in this paper, with the exception of Insh Marshes, in Badenoch and Strathspey, which is managed by the RSPB and has been published as a breeding site for this species (Nethersole-Thompson & Nethersole-Thompson 1986). All other sites are kept confidential, to protect the species from disturbance or egg-collecting. All newly discovered information which has come to light during this survey, and any previously undocumented records, have been lodged with the RBBP. Reports of Wood Sandpipers on spring migration were



**Fig. 1.** Map of Scotland showing the number of sites per region at which Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola* have been recorded in suitable breeding habitat since 1959. In some cases breeding was confirmed, while in others birds were present in suitable habitat but there was no indication that breeding took place.

derived from Scottish Bird Reports.

Criteria used to determine whether a record was classified as a possible, probable or confirmed breeding attempt were those used by Hagemeyer & Blair (1997). In many cases, possible breeding was the highest category that could be ascribed to a particular record, as little

information was available; consequently, some localities that are generally believed to be Wood Sandpiper breeding sites by fieldworkers in the Highlands could be categorised as only possible breeding sites.

## Results

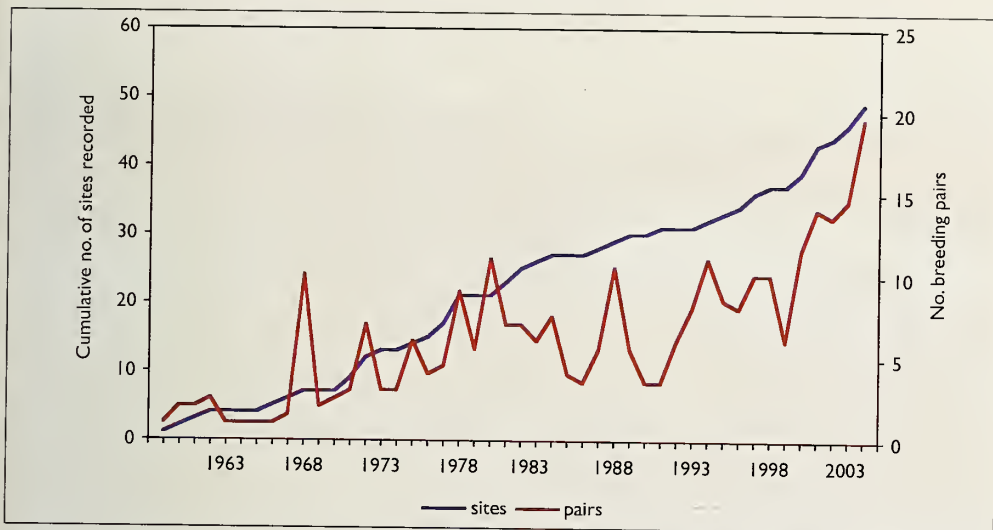
Wood Sandpipers were recorded nesting in Britain for the first time in 1853, when a nest was found in Northumberland. No other confirmed records exist before 1959, when a pair bred in Sutherland, although several possible breeding records within this period are summarised in table 1. Since 1959, Wood Sandpipers have nested annually in Scotland, and the number of

both breeding pairs and occupied sites has increased. Sutherland (18–20) and Caithness (5–6) contain the most sites recorded since 1959; Ross and Cromarty, Inverness, Kincardine and Deeside, Lochaber, and Badenoch and Strathspey each have four sites, and the districts of Perth and Kinross, Gordon, Moray, and the

**Table 1.** Summary of possible and confirmed breeding records of Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* in Britain up to 1959, since when the species has nested annually in Scotland.

Location	Year	Comments	Source
Prestwick Carr and Gosforth Lake, Northumberland	1853, 1857 and possibly 1828	A nest was found in 1853 and birds were seen displaying in 1857. Birds had been shot in previous years, as early as 1828.	Bolam 1912
Beachamwell, Norfolk	1864	Female and young shot in 1864, and assumed to have bred. Record now not considered to be fully authenticated.	Taylor <i>et al.</i> 1999
Elgin, Moray	Prior to 1865	Suspected to have bred but later disproved.	Baxter & Rintoul 1953
Gullane Links, Lothian	1867	Nest find recorded. No other reference or authentication found.	Booth 1881–1887
Badenoch and Strathspey	1940s onwards	Single birds were recorded in May during 1940s and 1950s.	Dennis 1984
Gladhouse Reservoir, Lothian	1955	Three birds seen, one displaying. Breeding considered unlikely.	Andrews 1986
Low Parks, Hamilton, Lanarkshire	1959	Bird seen displaying in May and June. Possibly suitable habitat at time, but now built over.	Meiklejohn 1960





**Fig. 2.** Cumulative total of sites where Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola* have been recorded in Scotland during the breeding season, and the combined annual total of possible, probable and confirmed breeding pairs recorded between 1959 and 2004 (a mean figure has been used to represent a reported range of breeding pairs).

**Table 2.** Number of years in which Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola* have occupied potential or actual breeding sites in Scotland.

Number of sites	Years of occupancy
25	1
11	2
4	3
2	5
2	7
1	8
1	13
1	14
1	22
1	23
1	31

### Records by district Caithness

Confirmed breeding has been reported from one site in the county. Here, birds were first recorded in 1972, and up to two pairs were reported in eight years between 1972 and 1982. Elsewhere, breeding has been suspected on a number of occasions from four or five sites. At one, Wood Sandpipers were first found in 1982, and one or two pairs recorded in seven years between 1982 and 2004. Of the remaining four, one site was occupied by one pair in 1972, 1989 and 1994; at a second site, one pair was present in 1988 and 1989; at a third site, birds were present in suitable breeding habitat in 1983; and finally, at another suitable site no information on the years of occupancy or numbers of pairs is available.

### Sutherland

This is undoubtedly the best region for Wood Sandpipers in Britain, where a maximum total of 20 sites have been occupied. Of these, two sites where confirmed breeding is known to have occurred have been occupied regularly, the first by 1–2 pairs in 13 years between 1959 and 1995, and the other by 1–3 pairs in 14 years between 1977 and 2004. Between 10 and 12 sites held Wood Sandpipers for only a single year between 1962 and 2004; probable breeding occurred at three of these sites and possible breeding at the other nine. At another six sites, possible breeding was recorded at two sites in

Western Isles each have one site (fig. 1).

The total number of pairs recorded in any one year has ranged from one to 21, and the number of sites occupied has varied from one to 12 (table 3). Altogether, between 47 and 50 sites have been used for possible, probable or confirmed breeding since 1959, nine of these having been discovered since 1998 (fig. 2).

Five sites have been occupied in more than ten years, and are referred to as 'key sites'. Numbers are thought to be stable at two of these sites, declining at two and the fifth site has not been occupied since 1995. Of the remainder, no less than 72% have been occupied in only one or two years (table 3).



**44.** A breeding site for Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola* in Ross and Cromarty, June 2006. This site held between one and five pairs in 22 years between 1972 and 2004. The range of habitats includes open water, grassland, heath and mire communities.

three years (1961–62 and 1975 at one, 2002–04 at the other), and at four sites in two years (1989–90; 1994 and 2001; 2001 and 2004; 2003–04).

#### *Ross and Cromarty*

Birds were first recorded in 1972 at a site where breeding was subsequently confirmed. This site has held between one and five pairs of Wood Sandpipers in 22 years between 1972 and 2004. Elsewhere, probable breeding was reported at one site in 1978 and possible breeding at two sites (1997 and 2001–02).

#### *Western Isles*

Possible breeding was recorded at one site on North Uist in 1987 and 2002.

#### *Inverness*

Probable breeding has occurred at two sites, the first in 1991 only, the second held 1–2 pairs in three years, 2001–03. Possible breeding has also been recorded at two sites, each for one year only, in 1978 and 2001.

#### *Moray*

Possible breeding was recorded at one site in 1981.

#### *Gordon*

Possible breeding was recorded at one site in 1977.

#### *Kincardine and Deeside*

Birds have been present in suitable habitat (i.e. possible breeding) at four sites; one site held birds in two years (1978 and 1980), while the other three sites were occupied in just one year (1973, 1978, 2000).

#### *Badenoch and Strathspey*

The Insh Marshes have long been recognised as an important breeding site for Wood Sandpipers in Britain. Birds were occasionally recorded here on passage in May during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, and overwintered for the first time in 1965. Nesting was first reported in 1968 and the species has subsequently been recorded here in a total of 31 years, although breeding has not been proved each year. Numbers peaked in 1980, at between five and seven pairs. Breeding attempts have been less frequent in recent years, with birds being recorded in only six of the ten years to 2004. The reasons for this decline are unknown but may be due to afforestation in the vicinity of the marsh. In addition, Wood Sandpipers have bred or attempted to breed at three other sites in Badenoch and Strathspey. At one site, birds were present in 1976 and 1985; at a second site, birds occupied suitable breeding habitat for the first time in 1981, and since 1983 one or two pairs have nested annually; and a third site, discovered as recently as 1998, has been occupied by 2–6 pairs in each subsequent year.

**Table 3.** Number of possible, probable and confirmed breeding pairs of Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* in Scotland, and number of occupied sites within each district, 1959–2004. In the table, the following abbreviations apply: Caithness (C); Sutherland (S); Ross and Cromarty (R&C); Western Isles (W), Inverness (I); Moray (M); Gordon (G); Kincardine and Deeside (K&D); Badenoch and Strathspey (B&S); Lochaber (L); Perth and Kinross (P&K). Note that one known Sutherland site has been excluded from this table as there are no data for the known numbers of pairs or years of occupation.

Year	No. of pairs	No. of occupied sites										
		C	S	R&C	W	I	M	G	K&D	B&S	L	P&K
1959	1		1									
1960	2		1								1	
1961	2		2									
1962	2		2									
1962/63	1		1									
1964	1		1									
1965	1		1									
1966	1											1
1967	1–2										1	
1968	8–12		2							1	1	1
1969	2		1								1	
1970	2–3		1									1
1971	3		1							1		1
1972	7	2	1	1						1		
1973	3	1							1	1		
1974	3	1								1		
1975	6	1	2							1		
1976	4	1								2		1
1977	4–5	1	1					1		1		
1978	9		1	2		1			2	1		
1979	5–6		1	1						1		
1980	10–12	1	1	1					1	1		
1981	7		2				1			2		
1982	7	2	1	1						1		
1983	6	1		1						2		
1984	7–8		1	1						2	1	
1985	3–5									3		
1986	3–4		1							2		
1987	5–6		1	1	1					2		
1988	7–14	2	1	1						2		
1989	5–6	2	1							2		
1990	3–4		1							2		
1991	3–4					1				2		
1992	5–7	1		1						2		
1993	1–9	1		1						2	1	
1994	10–12	2	2	1						2	1	
1995	8–9		3	1						2		
1996	7–9	1		1						2	1	
1997	10		1	2						2	1	
1998	10		1	1						3		
1999	5–7			1						2		
2000	10–13		1	1					1	2		
2001	13–15		2	2		2				3		
2002	12–15		2	2	1	1				2		
2003	13–16		4	1		1				2		
2004	18–21	1	7	1						3		





45. Between 18 and 20 sites have been recorded as breeding sites of Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* in Sutherland. This site, photographed in June 2006, has been occupied in 13 years since the first record in 1959, with the last record in 1995. Wood Sandpipers bred in the open habitat of mire and wet heath, intersected by pools, boggy channels and heathery ground.

### Lochaber

A nest was found at one site in 1960 and at another site where breeding was confirmed, Wood Sandpipers were present in five years (1967–69 and 1993–94). Probable breeding was recorded at a third site in 1996 and 1997, and possible breeding at a fourth site in 1984.

### Perth and Kinross

One site held one or two pairs in five years between 1966 and 1976.

### Other areas

There are three documented records of Wood Sandpipers assumed to be on passage but which

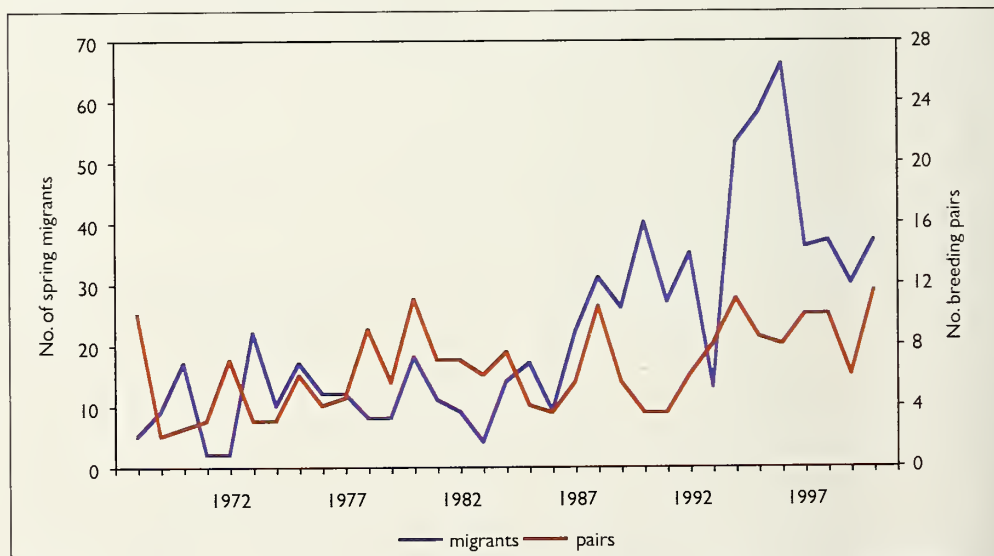


Fig. 3. Comparison of the annual total of Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola* recorded during spring migration in Scotland, and the annual number of possible, probable and confirmed pairs occupying potential breeding sites in Scotland, 1968–2000 (a mean figure has been used to represent a reported range of breeding pairs).

referred to singing or displaying birds. Of these, two (at Gladhouse Reservoir, Midlothian, and Hamilton Low Parks, South Lanarkshire) are mentioned in table 1. The third record concerns a bird on Coll, Argyll & Bute, in 1984. In this case, the source could not be contacted to clarify habitat and other details.

### *Effects of climate and climate change*

It has been suggested that the number of breeding pairs of Wood Sandpipers may be affected by spring weather, with abnormally cool temperatures or easterly winds resulting in more spring migrants remaining in Britain and increasing the number of breeding birds for that year. This study found that the number of spring migrants in Scotland was correlated with the number of breeding pairs recorded in each year ( $r=0.38$ ,  $p=0.03$ ,  $df=31$ ). This positive correlation suggests that such a relationship exists, and a comparison between the number of breeding pairs and spring migrants is shown in fig. 3.

Before drawing too many conclusions from this relationship, the influence of spring weather conditions requires further investigation. Comparison between the number of breeding pairs and the strength of the North Atlantic Oscillation showed no obvious relationship, and so other factors may be influencing this effect. The climate of northern Scotland is predicted to become warmer, with springs becoming wetter and summers drier ([www.sniffer.org.uk/climatehandbook/](http://www.sniffer.org.uk/climatehandbook/)). These changes will have an effect on wetland habitats, although whether this will deter or benefit Wood Sandpipers remains unclear. At a population level, the whole of this species' range may shift northwards. At a site level, higher water levels in spring could affect breeding-site choice, while drier summers could have both positive and negative effects – reduced chilling,



Bozena Kaleja-Summers

46. A Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* on its Scottish breeding grounds in June 2006. Having arrived in the breeding areas, the birds are particularly vocal when establishing their territory.

increased chick survival, but drier conditions reducing invertebrate supply. Future research on the factors that influence chick survival may shed more light on the possible impacts from climate change.

### *Long-term prospects*

In recent years, there has been an increase in both the number of sites and the number of breeding pairs of Wood Sandpipers being recorded in Britain. Whether this represents a real change in circumstances, or is the result of greater observer effort is unknown. It would suggest, however, that the current status of this rare breeding bird appears reasonably secure.

In recent decades, there have been only five key breeding sites for Wood Sandpiper in Britain. Two sites are presently thought to hold stable populations, but the number of breeding pairs is believed to be declining at two other sites, while the fifth has not been occupied in recent years. Given that the overall number of breeding pairs appears to be stable or increasing (fig. 2, p. 115), it is not clear whether the decline or loss of former key sites is an issue. Forestry





47. A relatively new breeding site for Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola* in Badenoch and Strathspey, June 2006. Up to three pairs have bred here since 1989, where the loch provides the main breeding and feeding habitats for the birds.

management is thought to be responsible for the decline at one site, and targeted management at this site may alleviate the problem and reverse the decline. The reason(s) for the fall in numbers at the other site is unknown.

Specific sites have suffered damage from forestry planting and agricultural drainage, and, where possible, such damage should be reversed. Some sites in Caithness, Sutherland, Ross and Cromarty, and Badenoch and Strathspey are now protected through designation as Sites of Special Scientific Interest under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), and as Special Protection Areas, under the EEC Directive 79/409 on The Conservation of Wild Birds. It is probable that peatland restoration work being carried out in Caithness and Sutherland ([www.lifepeatlandsproject.com](http://www.lifepeatlandsproject.com)) will also provide additional suitable habitat.

Research is now needed to identify the precise ecological requirements of breeding Wood Sandpipers in Britain. Initial research has been completed at one site (Kalejta-Summers 2002), which demonstrated that during the chick-rearing period, there was a strong preference for the wetter parts of the marsh. These provided the chicks with good cover, while

reduced livestock grazing and decreased abundance of the Common Bent grass *Agrostis capillaris* were also important. During summer 2006, a two-year research project began, with the aim of expanding this work to cover a range of sites. A better understanding of the ecological requirements of Wood Sandpipers throughout the breeding season will allow sensitive and positive land management, targeted specifically at this species, to be promoted by land-management advisers. This may include control of water levels, management of forest-edge habitat and grazing and/or cutting of wetland habitats.

Given the tight window of opportunity for detecting breeding Wood Sandpipers and the remoteness of many of the areas of suitable habitat, it is likely that there are more birds breeding each year than those being recorded. Since 1998, nine new sites have been discovered, some through survey work carried out in remote areas on behalf of the BTO, and others during evaluation as potential development sites. Many sites where birds have been recorded on only one or two occasions have seldom been visited again during the breeding season. Even some of the long-standing sites are visited infrequently. To rectify this, RSPB Scotland plans to survey every known site during the summer of



2007, and it is clear that there are exciting opportunities ahead for fieldwork in more remote areas for the next national Atlas.

#### Acknowledgments

My thanks go to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel for the data and help provided, as well as for instigating the production of this paper. I am very grateful to the County Recorders who provided useful information and advice. In addition, there are many individuals who have helped enormously by providing details of previously undocumented records and in clarifying the location of specific records but who must remain anonymous owing to the sensitivity of the information. My thanks go to all of these individuals. Thanks also to Ian Francis for his diligent initial search for information at the Alexander Library and to Linda Birch for following up later requests for information from the library. Mark Hancock and Ron Summers kindly helped with data analysis, and Ian Francis, Mark Hancock, Bozena Kalejta-Summers and Eilidh Smith commented on an earlier draft.

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# The BB/BTO Best Bird Book of the Year 2006

British Birds and the British Trust for Ornithology announce the winner of the Award for Best Bird Book of the Year.

All books reviewed in *British Birds* or the BTO publications *BTO News* and *Bird Study* during the year 2006 were eligible for consideration for this Award.



In total, 88 books were available for consideration in this year's competition, the format of which followed a familiar pattern. Each of the six judges compiled a ranked short-list of their six favourite titles, on the basis of the reviews published by *BB* and *BTO*, and their own experience. No formal criteria exist for the judges, but we look for special merit in books that we consider will have general and widespread appeal to the readership of both *BB* and *BTO News*. Judging took place at the BTO's Ringing & Migration conference in December 2006 and, thanks to the BTO library and Subbuteo Books, all the books selected initially were available for us to examine further.

In some years it requires a major effort to reach a final short-list, but this year we felt that the strength in depth of previous years was missing. Consequently we found that we had narrowed the field to a group of eight contenders remarkably quickly and, although our impression was that 2006 was not a vintage year, we wish to emphasise that these eight were all of high quality, and also that we all felt that we had a winner worthy of the title 'Best Bird Book of the Year'. The short-list of eight comprised the six books listed below, in addition to two handbooks singled out for special mention.

## **WINNER:**

**The Sound Approach to Birding:** a guide to understanding bird sound

*By Mark Constantine and The Sound Approach. The Sound Approach, Poole, 2006 (see Brit. Birds 99: 584–585).*

Our winner this year is the first concerted attempt, at least in modern times, to help field

birders to get to grips with bird vocalisations. Since Peter Grant and Killian Mullarney delivered us *The New Approach to Identification* in 1989, the steady progress in identification techniques has seemed to major on visual clues, helped significantly by advances in photographic gear. Check out how many people on your local patch are photographing birds compared with the number recording bird calls and song. This innovative book will perhaps lead to some redressing of that balance, and it is therefore a most welcome development. It is, of course, not the last word on bird sounds, but it is a jolly good start. We agreed with the *BB* reviewer's suggestion that most people who are serious about bird identification need to read and interact with this book (and it is sensibly priced to allow most to do so). Some may find the text a bit flippant, and/or feel that it needed some more polish; we took those comments on board but overall we felt that the authors' style actually made for a readable and approachable way of imparting their information, and one that will allow birders to get the most out of the text, the sonograms and the two CDs of bird calls that come with the book.

## **2nd: Lapland: a natural history**

*By Derek Ratcliffe. T. & A. D. Poyser, A&C Black, London, 2005 (see Brit. Birds 99: 160).*

This book embodies most if not all of the qualities we have come to associate with Poyser, and the publisher has done a fine job with Derek Ratcliffe's last major work. Derek was an excellent communicator and the text is well written, revealing both his depth of knowledge and his enthusiasm for his subject. The book covers the

ecosystems, flora and fauna of the parts of northern Europe and northwestern Russia lying within the Arctic Circle and is a landmark in Arctic natural history publication. The high-quality photographs of the region's habitats and wildlife are interspersed throughout and are one of the highlights. We felt that this book was a fitting tribute to one of the leading naturalists of his generation.

### 3rd: Bewick's Swan

By Eileen Rees. T. & A. D. Poyser, A&C Black, London, 2006 (see Brit. Birds 99: 583–584).

The leading monograph of the year, by a long way, this should stand comparison with the best of the Poyser monographs. It is fairly traditional in its format and layout, and in that sense it is not a groundbreaker, but that should not take anything away from the achievement of the author, Eileen Rees, who has done a magnificent job in researching and writing a book on this attractive bird. Most of the judges agreed with the BB reviewer in feeling that the publisher might have been a little more extravagant, and that the rather cramped layout and sometimes disappointing reproduction of some photographs did not match the design and quality of the second-placed book from the same stable.

### 4th: Cutting Away: the linocuts of Robert Gillmor

By Robert Gillmor. Langford Press, Peterborough, 2006 (see Brit. Birds 100: 126–127).

When one of us (RR) mentioned to Robert on the morning of the judging day that his book was in the initial short-list, he looked somewhat aghast: 'It really shouldn't be, it isn't a bird book' was his reply. Technically speaking, that is true, it's not a bird book; but it does contain much that will interest birdwatchers and both BB readers and BTO members. Robert is *the* outstanding exponent of the printmaker's art who specialises in birds, and this volume presents a fascinating history of bird art during his lifetime. The fact that it deals with his illustrations of cards and calendars, and his designs of birdfair posters, as well as his marvellous talents for observation of bird behaviour and animal movement in the landscape adds to the variety and interest of a terrific book. It is another cracker from the Langford stable, which in the last two years has launched some excellent art

books onto the market.

### 5th: Naturalised Birds of the World

By Christopher Lever. T. & A. D. Poyser, A&C Black, 2005 (see Brit. Birds 99: 327).

Although this book is technically an update of an earlier volume of the same name, which we took into account with our voting, this does not hide the fact that an enormous amount of work has gone into this new version – it is virtually a new book. As the BB reviewer observed, the introduction and establishment of bird species in the wild, outside their natural range, is a hot topic and the appearance of this book is timely; its qualities mean that it will be a significant tool for conservationists.

### 6th: Birds in Bhutan: status and distribution

By Peter Spierenburg. Oriental Bird Club, Bedford, 2005 (see Brit. Birds 99: 379–380).

We felt that this book was a really fine piece of work, and that it represented an important and impressive first step in improving our knowledge of the birds of this country. The author, and the Oriental Bird Club, should rightly feel well pleased with this book.

Last but not least, our two 'honourable mentions' are predictable enough: Vol. 10 of *HBW (Handbook of the Birds of the World)* and Vols. 6 & 7 of *HANZAB (Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds)*. *HBW* has been praised right from the start, it has featured regularly in these write-ups and has won this award outright on two previous occasions. The standards of this series remain of the very highest order; what more is there to say? All the judges were impressed with the quality of the final volumes of *HANZAB*; these are a thoroughly fitting culmination of a monumental project, and the authors deserve the fullest praise. *HANZAB* has never won the title 'Best Bird Book of the Year' and we debated whether it should this year; the fact that it deals with Australia and New Zealand and is thus well outside our usual remit of the Western Palearctic means that it is difficult to recommend it as likely to be of key interest to a majority of our readers; but that should not stop anyone with an interest in the birds of the region from completing their set with these two fine volumes.

Roger Riddington, Richard Chandler, Peter Hearn, John Marchant, Robin Prytherch and Bob Scott  
c/o Spindrift, Eastshore, Virkie, Shetland ZE3 9JS



# Notes

All Notes submitted to *British Birds* are subject to independent review, either by the Notes Panel or by the BB Editorial Board. Those considered appropriate for BB will be published either here or on our website ([www.britishbirds.co.uk](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk)) subject to the availability of space.

## Common Starlings roosting in sea caves

Roosting by Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* in caves may not be mentioned in BWP, as Prasad (2006) reported, but the habit is quite well known and there are several published references to it. It appears to be not uncommon in the Scottish Islands and in addition to Prasad's observation of it on Mull, it has been reported from several places in Islay (Elliott 1989), Skye (McMillan 2005), the Outer Hebrides (Cunningham 1990) and from South Ronaldsay, Orkney (*Orkney Bird Report* 1997). Moreover, such roost sites are referred to in the *Handbook* (Witherby *et al.* 1941) – 'in caves and cliffs on Scottish Islands' – and by Baxter & Rintoul (1953) – 'on many of our islands they roost in caves'. Sea caves on the mainland may also be used sometimes. Dickson (1992) mentioned Starlings roosting in them in Wigtownshire, Cook (1992) referred to a roost in a cave at Portknockie, Moray, and I have myself seen sea caves employed as roosts at both Duncansby Head

and the Castle of Old Wick in Caithness, while the *Caithness Bird Report* for 1987 describes another such roost at Noss Head. These few records, by no means an exhaustive list of the places where Starlings have roosted in sea caves, show that, in Scotland at least, the habit is widespread and by no means infrequent.

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## The South Pennine Twite population

The decline of the Twite *Carduelis flavirostris* in the South Pennines is well documented and a variety of explanatory factors, relating to land-use changes, have been suggested as the cause (McGhie *et al.* 1994). In reality, however, the cause of this decline may be more complex, perhaps the result of several factors combining in a way which is poorly understood, while natural population fluctuation may play a part too. This note presents some data from recent surveys conducted by the author.

A survey of the Peak District National Park in 2004 revealed a decline that has caused great concern (Carr & Middleton 2004). In the UK, Twite is a Red List species of conservation concern, owing to the historical decline in its breeding population throughout the UK (Gregory *et al.* 2002). Since 1990, the number of breeding pairs in the Peak District has declined from 136 pairs (in 88 1-km squares) to just ten pairs (in seven 1-km squares). Twites have van-

ished from many former haunts and the range contraction has been dramatic. The species is now restricted to three localities: Wessenden and Meltham moors west of Huddersfield, West Yorkshire; Edale, Derbyshire, in the extreme south of the Dark Peak; and the Combs Moss area of north Staffordshire.

Twite are thought to breed in loose colonies, making them difficult to census reliably and it is unlikely that these small numbers reflect the true breeding population. Brown & Shepherd (1991) found Twite to be thinly distributed throughout the area in 1990, and although numbers had declined in the Sheffield area of South Yorkshire there was no evidence to suggest any marked change in distribution at that time. In 1990, Twites were more thinly distributed south of a line drawn between Salybridge, Greater Manchester, and Holmfirth, West Yorkshire, and it is here that the greatest decline has occurred since 1990.

The decline of the British breeding popula-

tion has been attributed to the deterioration in quality and quantity of inbye land, and in particular seed-rich hay meadows in which the species feeds in summer (McGhie *et al.* 1994). This explanation is perhaps over-simplistic. A small study conducted by English Nature in 2003 (Middleton 2003) revealed that Twites preferred to feed in semi-improved meadows with a higher nutrient level, which allowed an abundance of Common Sorrel *Rumex acetosa* to grow. Moreover, the species has vanished from areas that appear to provide prime habitat. Twites show a strong preference for nesting in Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, and long Heather *Calluna vulgaris* (McGhie *et al.* 1994), and there are many apparently suitable Bracken- and Heather-covered areas of moorland adjacent to seed-rich hay meadows within the study area that no longer support breeding Twite (pers. obs.).

Brown & Shepherd (1991) estimated the entire South Pennines Twite population to be in the region of 415 pairs. A more recent estimate put the population at 200–500 pairs (RSPB 2001). If these figures were accurate, then perhaps the decline has not been as dramatic as feared initially, but may be related to a pronounced range contraction. In 2003, English Nature established that Twite remained abundant in certain parts of the Pennines, and that a 'hotspot' existed in the circle of moorland bordered by Marsden, Halifax and Todmorden, West Yorkshire, and Rochdale, Greater Manchester (Middleton 2003). Radiating away from this 'hotspot' they quickly become scarce and difficult to find. Considering that Brown &

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Shepherd found Twites to be thinly distributed throughout the area, it is conceivable that the overall population in the South Pennines may not have declined significantly, but that the distribution has changed markedly. Batty *et al.* (1999) provided evidence of considerable distribution change since the 1990 survey. While Twites were found in only 20% of the 1-km squares in which they were recorded in 1990, they also occurred in 18% of the sample of 1-km squares in which they were *not* recorded in 1990. Moreover, Batty *et al.* found that density in occupied squares had increased, on average, from 2.91 to 5.75 pairs. This again suggests that Twite may have undergone a range contraction but, perhaps, not an overall population decline.

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### Hawfinch fed by Greenfinch

During the period between early December 2005 and early April 2006, Hawfinches *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* were seen regularly in my garden in Barming, Maidstone, Kent; the peak count was seven, on 16th February 2006. In late December 2005, up to three birds (two males and a female) were often seen in a Field Maple *Acer campestre* at the bottom of the garden. One male appeared regularly with a flock of Greenfinches *Carduelis chloris* to eat the seed keys from the tree; the other male and the female made sporadic appearances, sometimes

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alone. On three separate occasions, I noticed that the single male Hawfinch was 'chaperoned' by a male Greenfinch, which tugged seed keys from the tree and presented them to the Hawfinch, which in turn accepted them quite readily. On the last occasion, the Hawfinch raised both wings momentarily before accepting the keys, but otherwise did not appear alarmed. I can offer no explanation for this strange behaviour, especially since I assume that the Greenfinch would normally present food in regurgitated form.

# Reviews

## GOING, GOING, GONE?: ANIMALS AND PLANTS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION AND HOW YOU CAN HELP

By Malcolm Tait. Think  
Publishing, London, 2006.  
216 pages, 100 full-page  
colour photographs and  
other illustrations.  
ISBN 1-84525-027-3.  
Hardback, £12.99.

This book is different, in fact it is rather strange – but I found it a most enjoyable read. As I delved deeper and deeper into the pages, however, I began to get a sense of guilt – guilt that I was enjoying it so much when clearly I should be getting angry – angry at what we are doing to the planet.

Over the years, there have been plenty of books with conservation messages warning us about the

doom and gloom that was just over the horizon, but there can be few – if any – books like this, with contributions from 99 conservation organisations between its covers. Organisations which range from the familiar RSPB to the less well-known Wollemi Pine Conservation Club. Each was asked to ‘pick one species, subspecies or habitat that needs saving’ – then the author/editor added one of his own. Among the 100 selected there are 21 birds, ranging from Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis* to Cerulean Warbler *Dendroica cerulea*, whilst the non-avian content includes species ranging from the to-be-expected Polar Bear *Ursus maritimus* and Lowland Gorilla *Gorilla gorilla* to the less expected English Elm *Ulmus procera* and Little Whirlpool Ramshorn Snail *Anisus vorticulus*.

Each species or habitat is allocated two pages, one a magnificent

photograph – none of which seemed to be the tired, well-known shots, and I particularly loved that of the Snow Leopard *Uncia uncia*. Facing the photograph is a page of text divided into three sections: a ‘Fact Box’ giving details of name, status, population, range and threats; a section of text supplied by the ‘sponsoring’ organisation; and finally a ‘What you can do’ box where there are indications of two actions you can take. For example, under Golden Conure *Guarouba guarouba* you can buy a T-shirt or print to support the work of the World Parrot Trust or find out more about what you can do by visiting the Trust’s website.

This is definitely a book to dip into species by species – get hold of a copy and tackle at least some of the ‘What you can do’ – it is at least very positive doom and gloom.

Bob Scott

## CUTTING AWAY: THE LINOCUTS OF ROBERT GILLMOR

By Robert Gillmor. Langford  
Press, Peterborough, 2006. 180  
pages; 92 print reproductions  
plus preparatory sketches.  
ISBN 1-904078-17-6.  
Hardback, £35.00.

The problem with this book is that I kept opening it to do the review, started reading, became engrossed with the prints and, before I knew it, another evening had gone by, and still no review written!

Robert Gillmor is surely known by everyone in Britain with an interest in birds. Many will have enjoyed his calendars and cards, sold by the biggest bird organisations, with their delightful crisp, clean designs, having graced homes nationwide for many years. For those with a keener interest in bird art, his name is synonymous with the bird art scene, being the major

influence in all manner of organisations relating to the promotion of bird art – a founder member and main instigator of the SWLA, as well as being art editor of a collection of major publications including *BWP* and the BTO atlases. Robert has always been approachable and generous with his time and advice, guiding many artists in the early stages of their careers. Nicholas Hammond says as much in his foreword and, reading this and the text, you gradually realise exactly how important Robert has been to wildlife art in Britain.

This book reveals Robert’s true passion in life. It is a collection of 92 linocut prints, coming principally from two periods of his life. Firstly, as a student then school teacher and, secondly, his time spent on the Norfolk coast where he now lives (‘retired’ is hardly appropriate), whence printing has resumed in earnest. Many will, like me, have known that Robert had an interest in printing but probably didn’t

realise the extent of his enthusiasm. Well, this book reveals all!

The book begins with an explanation of the workings of making a linocut, using a rock-pool book-jacket design as an example, showing the colours, in this case five, as they build up into the final print. Throughout the book, each linocut is captioned with the number of blocks used (but, curiously, an explanation of what exactly an elimination print is doesn’t surface until page 114). Then the prints come roughly in chronological order, each with an explanatory or anecdotal text and, sometimes, the field sketches. The text is well worth a close read, whether discussing the finer points of the print – the use of semi-transparent inks, an explanation of reflections for beginners – or recounting stories from Robert’s life in the bird publishing scene.

Each print is carefully designed – there is no room to change or redesign once the process has begun. Strong design has been a



hallmark of all Robert's work and his preoccupation with prints explains why he is so drawn to birds of bold pattern, such as Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta*, Northern Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus*, Common Shelducks *Tadorna tadorna* and Puffins *Fratercula arctica*.

During his 'working life', linocutting was largely put on hold, before the resumption of printing began in the late 1990s. His second period shows a lifetime's experience now gathered. The knowledge won flows into the prints, they show more development and confidence, and a marked change in style brings the whole print area into the design. A series of Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus* prints illustrates this perfectly, consisting of more com-

plete and sophisticated designs compared with the earlier work. Certain subjects (Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* and Grey Herons *Ardea cinerea*, for example) are revisited and it is fascinating to compare works from both periods.

One may be forgiven for thinking that images made from, say, only three flat colours may be a little stark, but just look at the New Forest scene entitled 'In the Shade' (page 150), which captures wonderfully the lazy buzzy atmosphere of a summer woodland. And there is a nice little touch here – we are one leg short of two ponies, a classic 'draw what you see, not what you think you know!' For an investigation of form, a bull is a classic subject, and 'The Cley Marsh Bull' (page 106) has it in abundance, the power, bulk and weight are all

there, created by three colours, with the clever use of semi-transparent ink to get a fourth. My absolute favourite is 'Avocets, Early Morning' (page 138), which captures the fresh and peaceful start to a day's birding along the Norfolk coast, when you feel that you have forever to enjoy it, and you know why you love birding!

Langford Press has published a gem of a book, and it should be Ian Langford's immediate task to get Robert to write more, although I venture it will be difficult to get him to put his cutting tools aside. I would love to see more of his field sketches reproduced as linocuts, and read more of Robert's encyclopedic knowledge of bird art and the birding community.

Alan Harris

THE BIRDS OF SÃO TOMÉ  
& PRÍNCIPE WITH  
ANNOBON:  
ISLANDS OF THE  
GULF OF GUINEA

By Peter Jones and Alan Tye.  
BOU Checklist No. 22,  
British Ornithologists'  
Union, Oxford, 2006.

172 pages; 34 colour plates;  
maps and line-drawings.

ISBN 0-907446-27-2.

Hardback, £30.00.

This, the 22nd checklist in the BOU Checklist Series, fills a large gap in the ornithological literature of western Africa. Although one of the smallest countries in the world, São Tomé & Príncipe supports over 20 endemic bird species as well as numerous endemic plants, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates. This new checklist has had a long gestation but is now finally here. It has definitely been worth the wait.

For many years our knowledge of the birds of São Tomé was restricted to collectors' accounts, and it was not until the early 1990s that ornithologists and birders were able to gain access to the islands.

Since 1990, four species which had not been seen for over 60 years (or 100 years in the case of the São Tomé Grosbeak *Neospiza concolor*) have become much better known. The São Tomé Fiscal *Lanius newtoni*, São Tomé Short-tail *Amaurocichla bocagii*, Dwarf Olive Ibis *Bostrychia olivacea bocagei* and São Tomé Grosbeak were feared extinct but records are becoming increasingly frequent, and the publication of this checklist is timely in that it brings together much previously unpublished information on these poorly known species. A wealth of new information has also been collected on the common and endemic species, and the checklist brings all this new information together. It starts with a description of the islands, their climate and geology and then discusses endemism in the Gulf of Guinea islands. The main habitats on the islands are described, followed by notes on the seasonality of breeding, migrants and turnover of species in the islands. The introduction finishes with notes on the major conservation issues and initiatives being taken to resolve them.

The systematic list forms the main part of the book. Common

species are dealt with briefly, but the less common and more interesting species have full and detailed accounts. There are some intriguing enigmas. In 1928, the collector José Correia collected four specimens of Madeiran Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma castro* which flew into a lighted room. These were distinctly different from other specimens previously collected and it is possible that they represent an undescribed subspecies that may be breeding in the islands. Also as intriguing is the São Tomé Grosbeak, which remains the 'holy grail' for visiting birders and has been seen by only a handful of people. Initially found in 1888 and seen again in 1890, it was over 100 years before it was rediscovered (in 1992) despite extensive searching and has been seen less than five times since.

If you are interested in these islands, or are intending to visit them, get a copy of this book as it gives you everything you need. The text is comprehensive and the 34 colour plates provide a real flavour of the habitats on the islands.

Phil Atkinson

# REMEMBIRD DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDER

Software Hothouse Ltd.  
£195.00.

(Memory card with audio  
library of European birds,  
£75.00.)

When this arrived at *BB* for review, the male component of the editorial board was falling over itself to be first to have a go. The female component muttered something about 'boys and their toys' and went off and had a baby. This, I think, illustrates the question that needs to be answered about RememBird – is it an indispensable piece of birding kit that everyone will need, or is it an expensive gimmick to be taken out once but forgotten within a week? As you might expect, the answer lies somewhere between these two extremes.

To a first approximation, RememBird is a digital voice recorder which can be attached to the underside of roof-prism binoculars using Velcro (supplied). It has two microphones; one is located just above your mouth for recording commentary, such as a verbal description of a bird under observation. The other microphone, higher gain for better quality, points forward for recording bird songs and calls. All recordings are stored digitally as .mp3 files; there is plenty of memory so it is capable of holding several days' worth of data.

Once home, the recordings, together with their date and time, can be downloaded onto a computer, then organised, filed and annotated using the software supplied. As recordings are downloaded, they are deleted from RememBird, clearing memory space for more days out. Files can be exported into other programs for further analysis. Installation of the software was seamless, and automatic updates were incorporated without trouble. Furthermore, the software allows you to

change the parameters of recording quality, energy-saving mode, etc.

Extra memory cards can be purchased; the one with the review unit incorporated an audio field guide to the 'Birds of Europe and North Africa', and cards for other geographical regions are available. These can be browsed via an ear-piece (supplied) or external speakers (not supplied), as can your personal recordings, e.g. if you think you have just captured the call of an interesting pipit *Anthus* and want to make sure the quality is OK. Generally, the recording quality is acceptable; providing you can hear the bird reasonably clearly, RememBird will capture it. It is not a professional-standard microphone, and is susceptible to picking up wind noise, or the rubbing of fingers against the casing, but the quality is good enough, at least to make sonograms from, and show the Rarities Committee that you really did hear what you are claiming to have done. As an example, I recorded the call of a Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus* in my back garden last October using RememBird, which was adequate for conversion to a sonogram (see <http://proregulus.blogspot.com/2006/10/fancy-smancy-stuff.html>).

RememBird is light and tough and, although you may initially have to adjust the way you hold your binoculars, in the field you will not notice it is there. It is not guaranteed to be waterproof (of necessity, it does have holes), but I twice took it out for several hours in the pouring rain and it never stopped working. It would be extremely easy to lose if not attached to binoculars, and I recommend using the Velcro supplied. It is powered by one AAA battery, which gives it a few hours of recording time. This is fine if you are just turning it on now and then, but if you are using it all the time as your permanent 'notebook', you will need a healthy stock of rechargeable batteries.

At almost £200.00, even without an audio library, this is not a purchase to be taken lightly. For similar money, you can get an MP3 recorder with a line-in for a small directional microphone, giving you a more flexible piece of kit that will produce more professional recordings, and leave you with money left over for the four Roche European birds CDs. What, then, does RememBird give you? First is the convenience – RememBird can be used while you are looking at the bird through binoculars, and does not need to be dragged out of a pocket in a panic as that Blyth's Pipit *A. godlewskii* flies over. Second, and this is the really innovative bit, you can keep RememBird in an 'always listening' mode, where it continuously records (and then presumably deletes) the last four seconds or so of what it hears (the exact length of time can be adjusted as you see fit). This means that you don't have to keep the record button pressed down for 25 minutes while you wait for a Hume's Warbler *Ph. humei* to call. Just press the record button within four seconds of it calling, and RememBird will save that four seconds, with the ID-clinching call 'in the bag'.

I have found this to be a genuinely useful bit of kit... in certain circumstances. As a notebook, it has not replaced my old-fashioned paper and biro, but I can see that maybe on a fast-moving seawatch, or as a mixed-species flock of tropical passerines moves through the rainforest, it would be a very handy device. In a mainland east-coast autumn situation, you are unlikely to rely on it too much. However, when the moment comes that you unexpectedly find you need to clinch the call of an interesting migrant, in a hurry, this is the recording device of choice.

Further details and specifications can be found at <http://www.remembird.com/>

Martin Collinson

# News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

## EU imposes permanent ban on wild-bird imports

The trade in wild birds is to be banned permanently throughout the EU because of fears for human and animal health. The ban, agreed in Brussels by member states' chief vets on 11th January, will be effective from 1st July. It means that up to two million wild birds will be saved from the pet trade, which has been blamed for significant declines in at least 55 threatened species, most notably parrots (Psittacidae).

The move has been welcomed by the RSPB, which has campaigned for a permanent ban for 20 years and comes hard on the

heels of a personal pledge by Tony Blair to push for a trade ban (*Brit. Birds* 100: 67). RSPB Chief Executive Graham Wynne said: 'This decision takes wild-bird conservation a hugely significant step forward. Millions of birds will now be saved, including the many that die before they even reach their destination.'

The wild-bird trade was temporarily banned in the EU in October 2005, after birds at an Essex quarantine centre were found to have bird flu. The import of small numbers of wild birds into the EU by zoos and some pet

owners will still be allowed. But traded birds listed by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) should drop from about 800,000 each year to a few hundred. The trade in CITES-listed wild birds was banned in the US in 1992, leaving the EU responsible for 87% of the trade. It is thought that perhaps one million birds not listed by CITES were also traded annually. The import of those birds will virtually halt too. And as up to 60% of wild-caught birds die before reaching Europe, these birds will also be saved.

## RSPB Mastermind passes on

Among all the obituaries for Magnus Magnusson, who has died of cancer aged 77, most emphasis was placed on his TV quizmaster days and his prolific writing of history books. But he also played an important role in nature conservation, as RSPB President from 1985 to 1990 and then as Chairman of the Scottish Nature Conservancy Council and its successor Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) from 1991 to 1999.

During his tenure at the RSPB,

the Society celebrated its centenary and passed the half-million members milestone. The late 1980s also saw the fierce debate over inappropriate conifer planting in the Flow Country of northwest Scotland. Magnus used his high profile to highlight the damage that tax-deductible blanket forestry was doing to the wilderness of Caithness and Sutherland and its birdlife. The battle was won and the afforestation scheme was scrapped.

Stuart Housden, RSPB Scotland's Director, who worked closely with him during his presidency years, said: 'Magnus cared passionately about people and conservation. His skills as a communicator could bring dry issues alive to all audiences. He had a knack of saying the right things at the right time, and his enthusiasm for environmental education and volunteering will leave a lasting legacy with the RSPB, as part of its core work in all parts of the UK.'

## Irish reintroduction of White-tailed Eagles

The reintroduction of White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* to Britain & Ireland continues apace. Following the announcement of plans to reintroduce the species to eastern England, Wales and eastern Scotland\* comes news that the Irish National Parks and Wildlife Service will start a five-year reintroduction scheme in southwest Ireland later this year.

Eagle chicks from Norway will be released into Killarney National

Park this summer. Eamonn Meskill, of the Parks and Wildlife Service, said: 'The hope is that after about eight weeks the chicks will have fully fledged and will fly out to the coast and then, with luck, they'll start breeding after four to five years.' Some 15 chicks will be brought into the region annually over the duration of the project.

White-tailed Eagles died out in Ireland in the early 1900s, persecution from gamekeepers and egg-

collectors being largely to blame. The same fate befell the Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*; reintroduction of this species began in 2001, with more than 40 birds released to date in Co. Donegal.

\*SNH is surveying sites along the Forth and Tay estuaries with a view to reintroducing the White-tailed Eagles after a 120-year absence.



## RSPB backs biggest windfarm – but not on Lewis

The biggest offshore windfarm in the world has won the backing of the RSPB, despite initial protests. But the Society remains implacably opposed to the world's largest *onshore* windfarm, planned for the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides.

The Trade and Industry Secretary granted permission for the £1.5-billion London Array, a 341-turbine windfarm in the outer Thames Estuary off northeast Kent, in December. This forest of windmills will spread over 90 square miles of sea and will provide up to one gigawatt (1,000 megawatts) of electricity or 10% of the UK Government's target for renewable energy production by 2010.

Initial surveys of the outer Thames Estuary, between 2002 and 2005, found a 7,000-strong wintering population of Red-throated Divers *Gavia stellata*. Until then, the entire UK wintering population was thought to be fewer than 5,000. After lobbying from the RSPB, the windfarm developers reduced the number of first-phase turbines from 258 to 175 to lessen the London Array's impact on the divers. Dr Mark Avery, Conservation Director at the RSPB, said: 'The co-operation of the developers has been exceptional and we are confident that the birds will not be affected by this first stage of the development. If monitoring shows that they are, then the developers have accepted that their plans for additional turbines will have to be dropped. We are very pleased that this windfarm is to be built. Renewable energy generation is crucial to tackling climate change and when windfarms do not cause environmental damage, the RSPB will be the first to support them.'

Meanwhile, the RSPB believes that breeding Red-throated Divers, Golden Eagles and Corn Crakes *Crex crex* remain at risk from the giant windfarm planned for Lewis. Anne McCall, Head of Planning and Development at RSPB Scotland, said: 'The approach of the London Array developers mirrors the constructive stance of many in the renewables industry. But on Lewis, the developers knew from day one that the site was protected by EU law, that their proposal would harm large areas of peatland and threaten a range of breeding and migrating birds.' Following detailed objections from the RSPB and local opponents, Lewis Wind Power submitted a revised proposal to the Scottish Executive in December for a reduced number of turbines – 181 rather than the 234 initially planned.



48. Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*, a key wintering species in the area where the London Array windfarm will be built.

## A bridge too far?

A proposed road bridge linking Denmark and Germany could have serious consequences for more than 90 million birds, as well as marine life such as seals (Pinnipedia) and porpoises (Phocoenidae), according to the German BirdLife Partner NABU, which has launched an e-petition to raise the alarm. Conservationists are concerned about the intention of the European Union, Denmark and Germany to build a huge cable-stayed bridge linking the German Isle of Fehmarn with Lolland on the Danish coast. Plans show that most of the traffic between central Europe and Scandinavia will be routed across this bridge – but this is also an area used by huge numbers of migrating birds flying from Scandinavia to the Wadden Sea and farther south.

The figures are staggering. Research by the Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg ornithologist working group suggests that this is one of Europe's most important bird-migration routes, used by up to 90 million migratory birds annually, including almost 20,000 raptors, around 300,000 Common Eiders *Somateria mollissima*, 50,000–80,000 Brent Branta *Branta bernicla* and Barnacle Geese *B. leucopsis*, together with 1,000 divers (Gaviidae).

'The current feasibility study gives only limited information on the impact on migrating birds. So far, no assessment under the EU Habitats Directive has been done, even though the area in question lies within and very close to three Important Bird Areas, which are partly protected by EU law as Special Protection Areas. It is vital [that] a proper impact assessment is carried out before any further plans are made,' said Ingo Ludwigowski, NABU spokesperson.

You can sign the e-petition, which is in German with English instructions, on the NABU Schleswig-Holstein website [www.nein-zur-beltquerung.de](http://www.nein-zur-beltquerung.de) (click on 'Info GB').

## Vulture recovery starts as first chicks hatch

Oriental White-backed Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* chicks have hatched in captivity for the first time since the Indian Vulture Recovery Programme started, in 2004. The first two vulture chicks hatched on 1st and 9th January at the Haryana breeding centre in northern India.

Three Asian vulture species face a grave threat of extinction following catastrophic population declines since the late 1990s (see [www.vulturedeclines.org](http://www.vulturedeclines.org)). The anti-inflammatory drug diclofenac used to treat livestock in India was identified as the toxic agent killing the vultures that fed on carcasses of cattle and buffaloes. To conserve the vultures, 130 nestling White-backed, Indian (Long-billed) *G. indicus* and Slender-billed Vultures *G. tenuirostris* were taken into captivity while diclofenac was phased out in the external environment. Scientists did not expect the birds to breed in captivity until at least 2008, since most birds are still too young to breed.

Dr Vibhu Prakash, Principal

Scientist for the vulture breeding programme, said: 'This success shows that we have got the conditions right, so now we can plan ahead with confidence to breed many more vultures in the future.'

The veterinary use of diclofenac is now being phased out in India, Pakistan and Nepal. In January 2006, scientists from the RSPB, Zoological Society of London and elsewhere proved that the drug meloxicam was a suitable, safe, alternative. Conservationists believe it will be at least ten years before diclofenac is no longer a threat. Vulture numbers are now so low that the birds' survival is largely dependent on captive-breeding success.

Dr Asad Rahmani, Director of the Bombay Natural History Society, said: 'The ban on the killer drug diclofenac must be implemented urgently and effectively to make sure that these vultures have a future. The increasing availability of meloxicam means that farmers and vets can switch to the new drug. But this must happen im-

mediately, if we are to avoid losing the last remaining wild vultures.'

Meanwhile, the Republic of Guinea has designated a specially protected area for vultures, the first of its kind in Africa. The 'vulture sanctuary' consists of approximately 450,000 ha in the Fouta Djallon Highlands, a region that holds a significant proportion of West Africa's vultures. This is encouraging news for conservationists, who are seriously concerned by recent findings showing that populations of six vulture species in the region have plummeted.

According to Guy Rondeau of Africa Nature International: 'Indirect poisoning, caused by birds feeding on treated carcasses left out by livestock herders to control "problem" animals (jackals [*Canis*], lions [*Panthera leo*], hyenas [*Hyaenidae*]), is a significant reason for the drastic declines, and another factor is the increasing rarity of carcasses because of a decline in numbers of big game throughout West Africa.'

## More Madagascar Pochards

Further to the revelation that Madagascar Pochard *Aythya innotata* has been rediscovered on a remote lake in northern Madagascar (*Brit. Birds* 100: 68) comes the news that the known adult population could be 20 birds, including a small group found on a second lake nearby. A 'twitch' from the capital, Antananarivo, by staff from three conservation organisations in early December logged at least 20 adult birds and three families of ducklings that could number a further nine birds.

Prior to the discovery of nine adults and four young last year, the Madagascar Pochard hadn't been seen since a single male was trapped on Lake Alaotra in 1991. This bird died in captivity a year

later and until the new colony was discovered, it was feared that he could have been the last of his kind. What puzzles researchers is why the pochard has survived in its current location but not at Lake Alaotra, the only previously known location for the species. The shallowness of the lake, suitable food plants and the absence of intro-

duced *Tilapia* fish could be the reasons.

Glyn Young, of the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, sums it up: 'The current population at the site almost certainly represents a classic remnant; an endangered species rediscovered where it has hung on by good luck and determination.'

## New address for BB subscriptions and admin

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# Recent reports

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Eric Dempsey

This summary of unchecked reports covers mid November 2006 to early January 2007.

**Red-breasted Goose** *Branta ruficollis* Saltfleet/Donna Nook area (Lincolnshire), two, long-stayers, to 10th January; Poole Harbour area (Dorset), long-stayer of unknown origin to 9th January. **Falcated Duck** *Anas falcata* Exmouth (Devon), one of unknown origin 18th–23rd November (first seen 22nd October), also at Bowling Green Marsh, 28th November to 10th December, and Exminster Marshes

(both Devon), 13th December to 7th January; Higham Bight (Kent), one of unknown origin, 19th–30th December; Coalhouse Fort (Essex), one of unknown origin, 6th January. **Black Duck** *Anas rubripes* Carrowmore Lough, Mullet Peninsula (Co. Mayo), 14th December. **Blue-winged Teal** *Anas discors* North Bull Island (Co. Dublin), returning bird from 7th December into January.

**Ring-necked Duck** *Aythya collaris* Large numbers were reported in Ireland, with at least 17 in

December and early January. **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* Craigavon (Co. Armagh), 16th December into January. **Lesser Scaup** *Aythya affinis* Knock Lake (Co. Dublin), mid November to at least 3rd December; Tiree (Argyll), 12th–17th November; North Uist (Western Isles), one from 17th November until end of period, with two on 26th November and 18th December; Caerlaverock (Dumfries & Galloway), 27th November to 17th December; Inch Lake (Co. Donegal), two, 2nd–7th December; Clea Lakes (Co. Down), 9th December into January; Sonning Eye Gravel-pits (Oxfordshire), 4th–8th January. **Black Scoter** *Melanitta nigra* Llanfairfechan (Conwy), long-stayer to 6th January at least. **Bufflehead** *Bucephala albeola* Unst (Shetland), 12th November to 8th January; Lough Atedaun (Co. Clare), 6th–7th January. **Barrow's Goldeneye** *Bucephala islandica*



49. Red-breasted Geese *Branta ruficollis*, with dark-bellied Brent Geese *B. b. bernicla*, Howden's Pullover, Lincolnshire, November 2006.



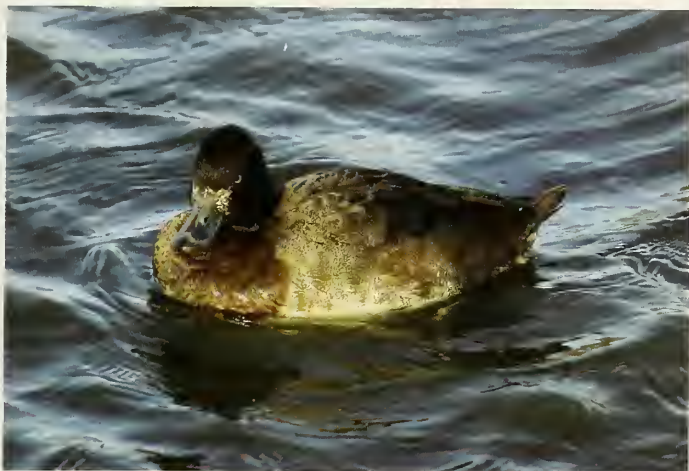
50. Female Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*, with female Shoveler *A. clypeata*, North Bull Island, Co. Dublin, January 2007.



Callander (Forth), 19th November to 9th January; Quoile Pondage (Co. Down), long-stayer to at least 6th January.

**Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*** Widespread influx into inland counties in central and southern England from late November onwards, many locations with multiple records, including up to six at Rutland Water (Leicestershire) from 8th December, three at Staines Reservoir (Surrey) on 8th and three at Chasewater (Staffs) on 9th December. **White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*** Flamborough Head (East Yorkshire), 10th December; St Mary's Island (Northumberland), then Lizard Point (Co. Durham), 17th December; Peterburn (Highland), 21st December; Durrus (Co. Cork), 1st January.

**Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*** After strong southwest winds, a good passage along the southwest and west coasts of Britain & Ireland, 3rd–9th December, including: 102 in one hour off Inveran (Co. Galway), 4th; at least 150 past Chesil Cove (Dorset), and 100 Black Rock Sands (Gwynedd), 5th; 50 Kenfig Pool (Glamorgan), and at least 136 Borth-Y-Gest (Gwynedd), 7th; 190 Crosby (Merseyside), 9th; and inland records 5th–8th in Berkshire, Cambridgeshire, Derbyshire, Greater London, Hertfordshire, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Oxfordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Surrey, Warwickshire and



Marcus Lawson

51. Female Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*, Caerlaverock, Dumfries & Galloway, December 2006.



Fraser Simpson

52. Male Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica*, Callander, Forth, December 2006.



Steve Young/Birdwatch

53. Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*, Crosby, Merseyside, December 2006.



Graham Catley

54. 'Black-eared Kite' *Milvus migrans lineatus*, Holbeach, Lincolnshire, November 2006.



Dave Pullan

55. First-winter Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea*, Ormsary, Argyll, December 2006.



Fraser Simpson

56. First-winter Ivory Gull *Pagophila eburnea*, Loans, Ayrshire, December 2006.

Worcestershire. Smaller numbers of other 'seabirds' (e.g. divers, skuas and gulls) were also involved.

**Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax* North Slob (Co. Wexford), 19th–28th November. **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* Hengistbury Head (Dorset), 23rd December; Otter Estuary (Devon), long-stayer 11th November to 16th December, same Otterton 1st–9th January. **Great White Egret** *Ardea alba* Salford Priors (Warwickshire), 17th December; Blashford Lakes (Hampshire), long-stayer to 7th January. **Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea* Little Chalfont (Buckinghamshire), 13th–20th November. **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* Fluke Hall (Lancashire), long-stayer to 15th December.

'Black-eared Kite' *Milvus migrans lineatus* Holbeach/Fosdyke area (Lincolnshire), long-stayer to 21st November; same bird Snettisham (Norfolk), intermittently from 24th November to 16th December and 3rd–9th January, and Cley/Blakeney (Norfolk), 26th December to 1st January. **Gyr Falcon** *Falco rusticolus* St Kilda (Western Isles), 16th–17th November; Unst (Shetland), 22nd November; Fetlar (Shetland), 27th–28th December and 6th January.

**American Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica* Blennerville (Co. Kerry), 29th December. **Whiterumped Sandpiper** *Calidris fuscicollis* Kilcoole (Co. Wicklow), 10th–23rd November; North Uist, 15th–17th November; Cantley Beet Factory (Norfolk), 18th–20th November;





John Carter



Ian Fisher

**57 & 58.** Long-billed Murrelet *Brachyramphus perdix*, with Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* (plate 58), Dawlish, Devon, November 2006; the first for Britain and second for the Western Palearctic, if accepted.

North Slob, 26th November; Freiston Shore (Lincolnshire), 23rd December; Cley, long-stayer to 6th December, and again at Salt-house (Norfolk), 15th–26th December; Ballycotton (Co. Cork), long-stayer to 26th December. **Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* Lough Beg (Co. Derry), two, 16th November; Alaw Estuary area (Anglesey), 28th–29th November and 16th–21st December; Ballycotton, 26th December; Oare Marshes (Kent), long-stayer to 9th January; Upper Tamar Lake (Devon), long-stayer again 12th–15th November. **Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes* South Uist (Western Isles), 28th November; Roscarberry (Co. Cork), long-stayer to 31st December. **Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularius* Upper Tamar Lake (Cornwall), long-stayer to 22nd November; Hayle Estuary (Cornwall), long-stayer to 10th January.

**Laughing Gull** *Larus atricilla* Grafham Water (Cambridgeshire), 19th November, presumably same Amwell Gravel-pits (Hertfordshire), 26th November; Sherkin Island (Co. Cork), 21st November; Llandulas and later at Pensarn (both Conwy), 16th December. **Bonaparte's Gull** *Larus philadelphia* Saltburn (Cleveland), 13th–14th November; Lunan Bay/Ferryden area (Angus),



Martin Scott



59. Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus*, Brue, Lewis, Western Isles, November 2006.

intermittently from 19th November to 9th January; Marazion (Cornwall), 23rd November; St Mary's (Scilly), 7th–30th December; Warleigh Flats (Devon), 7th December; Cobh (Co. Cork), 10th December to 4th January; near Wadebridge (Cornwall), 17th December; Blennerville, 18th December; Plymouth (Devon), 6th–7th January. Glaucous-winged Gull *Larus glaucescens* Hempstead (Gloucestershire), 15th–16th December. Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea* Loch Caolisport (Argyll), 14th

December to 9th January. Ivory Gull *Pagophila eburnea* Greenan and Ayr 13th–15th December, same Troon 24th December and near Irvine (all Ayrshire), 31st December to 3rd January; taken into care on last date, died 4th January. Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri* Cruisetown Strand (Co. Louth), long-stayer to 9th December. Long-billed Murrelet *Brachyramphus perdix* Dawlish Warren area (Devon), 7th and 11th–14th November.

Alpine Swift *Apus melba* Kenfig Pool, 29th November, presumed same Mumbles Head (both Glamorgan), 4th December. Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* Lunan Bay (Argyll), 12th November; Portland Bill (Dorset), 13th November; Norbury Junction (Staffordshire), 21st November. Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi* Tanybwllch (Ceredigion), 1st–2nd January. Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* Rogerstown (Co. Dublin) 24th

December to at least 7th January.

Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus* Small influx from December onwards, mainly into northeast Scotland, with up to 60 in Aberdeen being the largest gathering. Farther south, flocks in single figures reached Bedfordshire, Kent, Norfolk and Suffolk. Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus* Durlleston Castle (Dorset), 26th November; Spurn (East Yorkshire), 26th November; Hengistbury Head, 2nd December; Holyhead (Anglesey), 17th–18th December; Hightown (Merseyside), 19th–27th December. Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei* Donmouth (Northeast Scotland), 12th–30th December. Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* Spurn, 9th and 14th–24th November; Sladebridge (Cornwall), 18th November. Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* Grove Ferry (Kent), 9th November; Rainham Marshes (Greater London/Essex), 22nd December to 8th January. Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* Wadebridge, 9th November; Benacre Pits (Suffolk), 13th–25th November.

Steve Young/Birdwatch



60. Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*, Hightown, Merseyside, December 2006.



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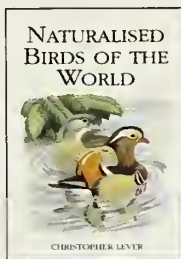


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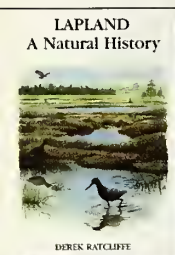


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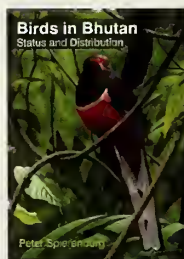


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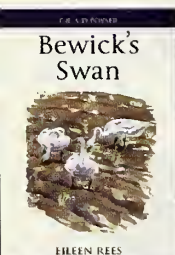


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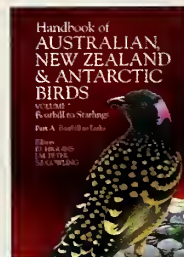


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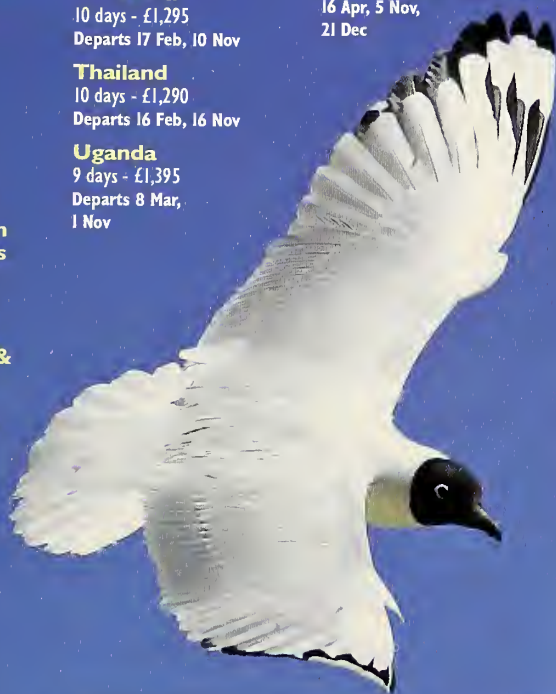
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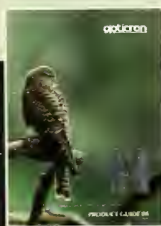
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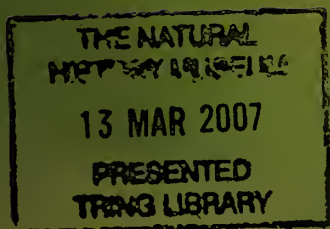
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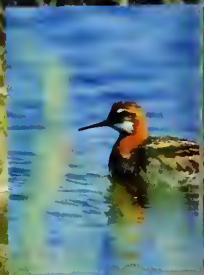


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# Foraging behaviour of Pomarine Skuas off the Suffolk coast in winter 1999/2000

*Peter J. Dare and Paul Read*



Juvenile Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus* and Common Gulls *Larus canus*.

*Richard Johnson*

**ABSTRACT** Pomarine Skuas *Stercorarius pomarinus* occur regularly in small numbers in the southern North Sea during the winter months. During winter 1999/2000, exceptional numbers, up to 25, were present along the coast of Suffolk between December 1999 and April 2000. Studies of their feeding behaviour established that Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* formed the primary target species between early December and late January, when flocks followed shoals of sprats *Sprattus sprattus* into inshore waters. Numbers of Kittiwakes declined from mid January onwards, associated with the departure of the sprats, and Common Gull *Larus canus* then became the favoured target species. In comparison, attacks on larger gulls were less frequently noted, and no attacks were recorded on Black-headed Gulls *L. ridibundus*. It is suggested that the change from active pursuit of feeding Kittiwakes to a more passive strategy, waiting and ambushing passing gulls, in late winter and early spring was an energy-efficient strategy to obtain food in situations where many potential victims were commuting between estuarine and terrestrial feeding areas and inshore resting areas.

The winter feeding ecology of Pomarine Skuas *Stercorarius pomarinus* in European waters is poorly understood, since the majority of the West Palearctic population is then largely in tropical (upwelling) waters off West Africa. There, large flocks can gather around fishing fleets to take mainly fish, both by scavenging and by kleptoparasitism, and to prey on seabirds and phalaropes *Phalaropus* (Cramp & Simmons 1983; Furness 1987). As elsewhere around European coasts, Pomarine Skuas are scarce and irregular along North Sea coasts during the winter, although sightings have become more frequent in coastal Suffolk since 1990 (Furness 1987; Olsen & Larsson 1997; Piotrowski 2003). During winter 1999/2000, exceptional numbers of Pomarine Skuas (up to 25 birds at times) were present along the Suffolk coast from December into April (*Suffolk Bird Report (SBR)* 2000; Dare & Read 2006). We observed many of these skuas foraging among flocks of gulls (Laridae) almost daily throughout this winter. Given the paucity of dietary information from west European seas, our observations of foraging behaviour, during the 1999/2000 and other recent winters, indicate how some Pomarine Skuas can winter successfully in northern temperate waters.

### Methods

During the 1999/2000 winter, all observations were made from land-based watchpoints using ×32 wide-angle telescopes, primarily at Kessingland and Covehithe, c. 6 km and 10 km south of Lowestoft, respectively. Daily 2–5-hour watches at Kessingland (totalling 347 hours) were split more or less evenly between mornings and afternoons. Covehithe watches (137 hours) were confined to early mornings and were less frequent; findings from this site were, however, comparable and are therefore combined with those from Kessingland. All skua sightings were logged for 484 observation hours, from which we estimated the minimum number of different individuals seen each day between 1st December 1999 and 30th April 2000, based on age and plumage differences, timings and flight directions.

### *Skua ages, and numbers present in the study area*

The vast majority of skuas observed were immatures, predominantly first-winter birds except for a 'subadult', with paler head and large

white ventral area, which was occasionally seen from February onwards. In early March, the population comprised at least 12 first-winters as well as a second-winter, an older immature ('subadult') and an apparent winter-plumaged adult.

Accurate counts were not always possible because the skuas ranged north and south beyond our sector in response to fluctuating foraging opportunities (Dare & Read 2006). The skuas were most plentiful in late December 1999 (up to ten different individuals identified in a day) and again in late February and early March (up to 13 birds daily). Between mid and late January, no more than two were seen in one day, and the last wintering bird was noted on 15th April 2000. Skua numbers and feeding activity were usually higher in the afternoons than in the mornings off Kessingland. This difference was especially pronounced when birds were most plentiful, in March. Only in January were the morning feeding rates higher. Overall, the hourly sightings rate was 52% higher in the afternoon.

### *Seabird species attacked*

The Pomarine Skuas appeared to feed mainly by kleptoparasitism, exploiting the numerous gulls that were feeding on shoals of sprats *Sprattus sprattus* within 5 km of the coast. The mixed gull flocks contained predominantly Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla*, Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* and Common Gulls *L. canus* in January; then Common, Black-headed and larger gull species in February and March. We noted an influx of Kittiwakes in late December (>2,500 moved south in four hours on 26th December), and 500–1,000 or more were feeding daily in early January. Many Kittiwakes fed where sprats were being brought to the surface, either in the wake of large vessels or by tidal disturbance at an inshore sandbank. Small boats fishing for sprats, part of a substantial Suffolk sprat fishery that winter, also attracted gull flocks. South of the area, even larger flocks of Kittiwakes were reported during January (*SBR* 2000), and these evidently moved up and down the coast in response to periods of strong southerly winds. By late January, however, Kittiwake numbers had fallen dramatically; and during February and March we saw only 220 birds in 70 hours of observations. In contrast, Common Gulls remained in good numbers all along the coast throughout the winter

(1,000–1,500 present at some sites in January) and hundreds foraged regularly off our study area most days. Herring Gulls *L. argentatus* were also plentiful daily in our area (though not counted), together with small numbers of Lesser Black-backed *L. fuscus* and a few Great Black-backed Gulls *L. marinus*.

The incidence of skua attacks on different species is shown by half-month periods in fig. 1; attacks aborted en route to intended victims are excluded. We observed a total of 408 attacks upon the above five gull species and two attacks

upon Northern Gannets *Morus bassanus*. Of these, 347 attacks were noted off Kessingland and 61 off Covehithe. Over the winter, at least 74% of attacks were directed at Kittiwakes and Common Gulls (split more or less equally), and 8.5% at larger gulls. In a further 16.9% of incidents the victim could not be identified with certainty owing to attacks being made within mixed-species flocks at long range or in poor visibility. No attacks on Black-headed Gulls were observed. As might be expected, most attacks were recorded when skuas were numerous. Thus, 39% of attacks (2.05 per hour) were logged in early March but only 2.2% (0.17 per hour) in early December and 3.7% (0.24 per hour) in late January (fig. 1). Comparable observations were made by PJD in the winters of 1993–99, when between one and five Pomarine Skuas were sometimes present off Covehithe. There, a total of 29 attacks had comprised 11 (37.9%) on Kittiwakes, ten (34.5%) on Common Gulls, one (3.4%) on a Black-headed Gull, three (10.3%) on Herring Gulls, and four (13.8%) on unidentified gulls.

The species composition of the victims showed marked trends through the 1999/2000 winter (fig. 2). Kittiwakes predominated (at least 78–91%) during December and early January. Later in the winter, the skuas switched their attentions increasingly towards Common Gulls (at least 50–67% of identifiable attacks) and the larger species (8–16%). Both immature and adult Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls were attacked, but only one immature Great Black-backed Gull (a tentative effort by a third-calendar-year skua). From mid February onwards, few attacks on Kittiwakes were recorded, as numbers of the latter declined. At the same time, the Pomarine Skuas changed their hunting tactics.

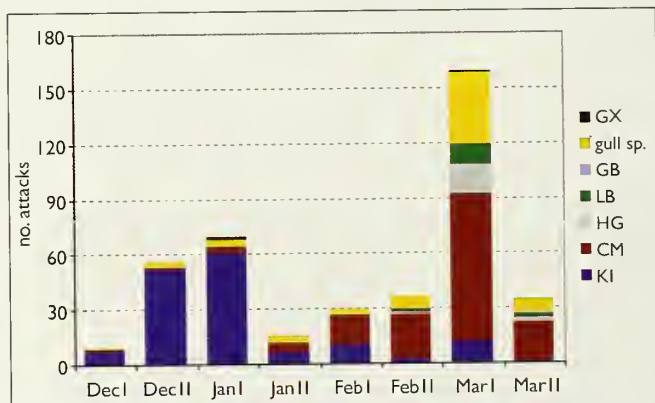


Fig. 1. Number of Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus* attacks recorded on Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* (GX), Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus* (GB), Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus* (LB), Herring Gull *L. argentatus* (HG), Common Gull *L. canus* (CM) and Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* (KI) in coastal Suffolk, in half-month intervals between December 1999 and March 2000. Unidentified gulls are recorded as 'gull sp.'.

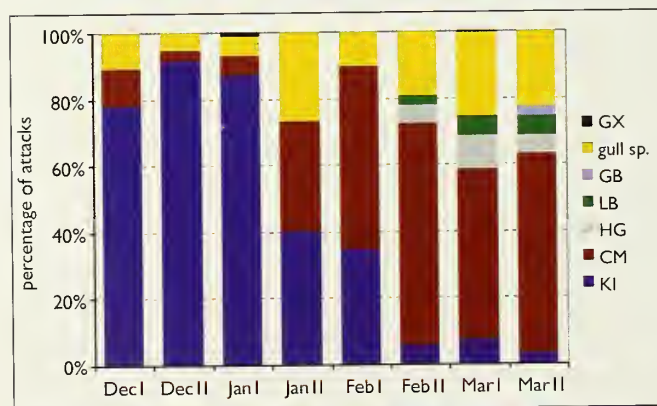


Fig. 2. Percentage of Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus* attacks on different seabird species off the Suffolk coast in winter 1999/2000. Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* and Common Gull *Larus canus* were the main target species. As the winter progressed, the composition of wintering seabirds changed with the dispersal of the sprat *Sprattus sprattus* shoals, resulting in Pomarine Skuas adapting to varying prey-species availability. This illustrates the importance of wintering Kittiwakes from early December to mid January, and shows that as these dispersed, Common Gulls became increasingly targeted.



### Foraging strategies

Two distinct methods of hunting were employed by the skuas. When Kittiwakes and Common Gulls were feeding in dense, mixed flocks early in the winter, Pomarine Skuas hunted actively for long periods by patrolling the area and dashing into the flocks. One bird aggressively chased four Kittiwakes in rapid succession. Sometimes two or three skuas chased the same victim. Up to ten skuas were seen by PJD hunting simultaneously in this way at Sizewell on 6th January 2000. Patrolling skuas occasionally attacked from some height. By late winter, however, the skuas had switched to attacking mostly Common Gulls, but also some of the larger gulls, moving between terrestrial feeding and resting areas in local estuaries, harbours and coastal fields. For this, they adopted opportunistic 'ambush' tactics in which widely scattered individuals would wait on the sea to intercept targeted gulls selected

from the steady stream passing some 15–50 m above the water. A skua would then attack by accelerating in low flight over the sea, typically for 100–300 m, before climbing quite steeply to attack the gull, usually from behind and below, but occasionally from above. There was seldom any chase given at high level; either the victim regurgitated food immediately, or it did not. Food was retrieved either in the air or from the water. Some gulls turned after the attack and mildly mobbed the skua as it descended. Following a pursuit, most skuas then rested on the sea again, and sometimes bathed, presumably to

wash off the residual fish oils from their meal (no gulls were observed bathing). Apart from attacks on gulls, we twice observed Pomarine Skuas force a Northern Gannet onto the sea but apparently without obtaining food.

Hunting success varied widely. Some skuas could achieve three successful pursuits within the space of 15 minutes, while others waited up to an hour between making attacks. We were unable to measure overall success rates, mainly because of long viewing distances or poor visibility. Despite their size, Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls generally voided food more



Chris Darby



Chris Darby

**61 & 62.** Exceptional numbers of first-winter Pomarine Skuas *Stercorarius pomarinus* wintered off the Suffolk coast during the winter of 1999/2000. This bird was photographed at Kessingland, where much of the data presented in this paper were collected, in late November 2005.

readily than did smaller gulls, often at the first sight of a closing skua. For example, six of ten attacks on Herring Gulls at Covehithe were successful. By contrast, two skuas chased an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull for 1–2 minutes without success. Common Gulls were also rather easy victims, requiring close pursuit of only 10–20 seconds, whereas Kittiwake pursuits often lasted longer, up to 45 seconds, and involved numerous twists and turns reminiscent of Arctic Skua *S. parasiticus* attacks.

### Discussion

A combination of ecological and physical factors could explain why Pomarine Skuas are attracted to the Suffolk coast, where wintering skuas have been recorded in ten of the last 12 winters (Dare & Read 2006). Most importantly, the skuas associate with Kittiwakes and other gulls feeding at dense shoals of sprats, which move into shallow waters from November to mid February, and support local fisheries (Johnson 1966, 1970). At this season, the youngest sprats are between 60 and 70 mm in mean length, while the oldest can reach up to 140 mm and most are therefore suitable for Kittiwakes to take (Cramp & Simmons 1983). The fish also become more accessible to other seabirds at this time, including internationally important numbers of wintering Red-throated Divers *Gavia stellata*, which can exceed 1,000 in our study sector (Dare 1998b) while up to 4,700 of these 'sprat borers' (old East Anglian name) have occurred in more recent winters 23 km to the south, off Thorpeness (SBR 2005).

Pomarine Skuas have overwintered occasionally elsewhere along the east coasts of England and Scotland in association with winter sprat shoals and gull flocks in shallow waters. In the outer Thames estuary, up to 35 skuas were observed around two fishing boats off Southend Pier in December 1985, and a few birds have occurred there in recent winters (D. L. Davenport *in litt*). During the 1985 autumn influx, many skuas frequented the shallow inner waters of the Moray Firth, Northeast Scotland, where they were attracted by numerous Kittiwakes and other gulls feeding on sprat shoals (Fox & Aspinall 1987). At least nine skuas were still present here on 24th December, suggesting that some may have overwintered. By contrast, the large sprat concentrations found in winter from

the Wash to Flamborough Head, East Yorkshire (Johnson 1970), appear not to attract Pomarine Skuas, perhaps because the sprats are in mainly deeper water and probably less accessible to Kittiwakes, other gulls and skuas.

The wintering Pomarine Skuas off the Suffolk coast adapted their main foraging technique in response to seasonal changes in feeding opportunities. The decrease in Kittiwake numbers during the winter appears a normal feature in our study area (Dare 1998a), and probably coincides with the February departure of sprat shoals to their spring spawning areas well offshore (Johnson 1970). The subsequent switch by the skuas from actively chasing feeding flocks of Kittiwakes in January to the more passive method of ambushing passing Common Gulls and large gulls later in the winter and in early spring was particularly striking. The latter tactic would have saved energy in situations where victims were not visibly feeding but, instead, commuting between mainly terrestrial feeding and inshore resting areas. We observed neither predation on other birds nor scavenging of carcasses, as was recorded during the 1985 influx (Fox & Aspinall 1987), although one Pomarine Skua in our study area was reported to have killed and eaten a Black-headed Gull (SBR 2000).

### Acknowledgments

We are grateful to David Davenport for information on skuas in the Thames estuary, to Dr Chris Darby for providing his photographs, and to Dr Mike Harris for his constructive comments on the draft manuscript.

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# Purple Martin on Lewis: new to Britain

Shaun P. Coyle, Torcuil C. R. Grant  
and Mark J. Witherall

**ABSTRACT** A juvenile Purple Martin *Progne subis* was found at the Butt of Lewis, Western Isles, on 5th September 2004 and was still present the following day. This represents the first record of this distinctive North American hirundine for Britain and the Western Palearctic, although another was discovered on Flores, Azores, on 6th September 2004. It is speculated that the passage of Hurricane Gaston along the eastern seaboard of the USA in early September may have been responsible for the bird's displacement across the North Atlantic.

Early September 2004 had proved to be a quiet time for migrants in the Western Isles and it seemed that 5th September 2004 would be just another Sunday. Consequently, our expectations were low and it seemed that the best bet for birding success on Lewis lay with the possibility of finding an American wader. But we began the day by checking woodland around Stornoway where a Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla* had been reported. Having failed to find it, we moved on towards the west coast of the island, stopping at various points along the way; by mid afternoon, however, we had little to show for our efforts other than a Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* and a single Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*. We pressed on to the Butt of Lewis, intending to check the pools at the headland for waders and spend some time seawatching. But that was about as far as we got that day.

Immediately upon our arrival at the Butt of Lewis lighthouse, at around 14.30 hrs, we noticed a large hirundine flying around the cliffs in front of us, and soon realised that it was something rather different! It was obviously larger than all the European hirundines, and showed a pale collar, dark brown upperparts, and greyish-brown breast and flanks that contrasted with a pale belly. We were perplexed, although we realised that we had something exciting on our hands; it was fortunate that the bird then landed on a wire inside the lighthouse

compound, where we were able to observe it through telescopes. On closer examination, SPC noticed a pale blue sheen on the bird's mantle and right 'shoulder' and the realisation dawned that it could only be a Purple Martin *Progne subis*! While MJW began to set up his video equipment, SPC and TCRG moved to the other side of the compound to view the bird face-on. From this angle, a number of other plumage details could be seen, including fine streaking to the lower breast, belly and undertail-coverts, and a large, broad bill with a distinctly decurved upper mandible. Once the bill shape was seen, SPC and TCRG became confident that the initial identification was correct; both had previously seen the species overseas on several occasions. The words 'It's a Purple Martin!' were repeated in disbelief for the next ten minutes or so!

Since we had no relevant field guide to hand, and realising both the significance of the find and that the identification needed to be confirmed, we began to make telephone calls to friends. MJW contacted Tom McKinney at 'Birdnet' and, from our description, he was able to check references and confirm the identification. We had already called Martin Scott (MS) and, shortly afterwards, he arrived at the lighthouse and soon agreed with our identification, also having seen the species abroad.

The Purple Martin remained faithful to the vicinity of the lighthouse and the nearby cliffs



Martin Scott



Yvonne Benting/Hebridean Imaging



Yvonne Benting/Hebridean Imaging



Yvonne Benting/Hebridean Imaging

63–66. Juvenile Purple Martin *Progne subis*, Butt of Lewis, Western Isles, September 2004.

for much of the day. In the rather dull and overcast conditions, it often flew close to the ground to feed, frequently coming within a few metres of the small group of observers who had gathered to see it. During this period, it also gave prolonged views as it perched on overhead wires and this presented an ideal opportunity to photograph it. On one occasion during the afternoon, it flew out to sea towards the north-east until it was almost lost from sight, before returning to feed over a nearby pool. It continued to fly around the headland until dusk, when it presumably went to roost.

The three of us, along with MS and Andy Robinson (AR), were present at the lighthouse early the following morning in the hope that the martin would still be there. Conditions were rather dull and misty, and there was no sign of the bird when we arrived. Despite this, Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* were only just departing from their roost, so there was still cause for optimism. Shortly after 07.30 hrs the Purple Martin appeared, much to the excitement of AR, who had spent the previous day visiting Harris – without a mobile phone! The

news was immediately broadcast to ensure that those who were already on their way to Lewis knew that the bird was still present.

As the morning air began to warm, the mist cleared and the Purple Martin began to range farther afield than it had the previous day; a small hill a few hundred metres south of the lighthouse proved to be a good vantage point from which to watch its movements. At about 08.50 hrs, just as a Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* shot past, the bird was lost from sight and was still missing when the first visitors from the mainland arrived. Fortunately, it was relocated by TCRG, much to the relief of the visitors, just after 10.00 hrs, flying near Eoropie village, a kilometre or so to the south of the lighthouse. By now the morning was warm and sunny with a light easterly wind and the bird generally fed over nearby fields and occasionally overhead.

The bird remained over Eoropie and the surrounding fields for almost three hours but at 12.45 hrs, it climbed to about 30 m in the now clear blue sky and headed off to the south. Fewer than 50 birders had made it from the

mainland in time. Unfortunately, another 50 or so arrived just after its departure. Despite considerable searching, the martin was not found/seen again, although with so many birders combing the area it came as little surprise when a Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis* was found in the vicinity of the lighthouse, emphasising yet again just how good, and under-watched, the Western Isles are for rare and scarce birds.

### Detailed description

The following description is based on notes taken by SPC.

### General appearance and jizz

Clearly a martin, but noticeably large and with a conspicuous pale collar contrasting with dark brown upperparts. Flight was strong, with rather slow wingbeats. It was often watched gliding for relatively long distances before 'stooping' and flying close to the ground, sometimes recalling a small female Merlin *Falco columbarius*. When perched, the bird's peaked-crown appearance was reminiscent of certain American *Myiarchus* and *Contopus* flycatchers, especially when viewed side-on.

### Head and neck

A thick black eye-stripe contrasted with a brown forehead and darker, sooty-brown crown. The eye-stripe tapered behind the eye to form a wedge and gave the bird a 'masked' effect. A bluish sheen was noted twice along the lower edge of the crown when the bird was viewed face-on, but was visible only in good light. The nape was also sooty-brown. The chin and throat were greyish-brown with fine darker streaking.

### Upperparts

Mantle, rump and uppertail-coverts were dark brown. A bluish sheen was noted on the upper mantle occasionally. The tail had a shallow fork and was dark brown with pale edges to the uppertail-coverts. The upperwing was dark brown with buff-brown tips to the greater coverts, pale tips to the secondaries and very fine pale tips to the primaries. When the bird was perched, the wing-tips extended just beyond the tail, by two or three primary tips.

On one occasion (which led to the initial identification of the bird), a bluish tinge was noted on the right shoulder (scapulars) when

the bird was perched, although this was very faint.

### Underparts

Dirty white, with extensive brownish blotches and streaks forming a band on the upper breast, which contrasted with the pale collar. The breast was marked with dark brown streaks, these becoming finer on the belly, and there were brown blotches along the flanks. The undertail-coverts were finely streaked with small dark 'arrowheads', and a pale brownish band across the vent was quite noticeable. The underwings were dark sooty-brown with blackish axillaries. The undertail feathers were dark brown, although they appeared black most of the time, especially in flight.

### Bare parts

The eye was dark. The relatively long bill was black, thick and broad-based, which was particularly apparent when seen head-on. The upper mandible was distinctively curved downwards. Leg colour was not seen.

### Identification

Purple Martin is a particularly distinctive species. It is the largest member of the genus *Progne* (in fact, it is the largest of all hirundines), which comprises nine species with New World distributions; and is the only one that breeds across temperate North America (Clements 2000). Male Purple Martin is relatively straightforward to separate from males of these other species, while females and juveniles are the only members of the genus to show a pronounced greyish collar and contrastingly paler forehead. As the accompanying photographs illustrate (plates 63–66), these features, together with the birds' large size and robust structure, readily establish the identification of the Lewis bird as Purple Martin.

Three races of Purple Martin are recognised. The widespread nominate form breeds across much of eastern North America, north to southern Canada, west to Montana and central Texas and south to the highlands of central Mexico. This form is replaced in southern Arizona and western Mexico by *P. s. hesperia*. To the west, the nominate form is replaced by *P. s. arboricola*, which breeds along the west coast of the USA, and north to southern British Columbia.

Male Purple Martins take two years to attain

the purple plumage, but breed in their second calendar-year in a female-like plumage. Adult males of the three races have identical plumage characters, although the western races may show less purple on the underparts (Hill 2002). Otherwise, they are separable only on measurements, *hesperia* being slightly smaller than the nominate form while *arboricola* averages larger. Females of both *hesperia* and *arboricola* are generally paler than those of nominate *subis* and, in particular, appear paler on the underparts and on the forehead. In addition, they both show a greyish-white collar which is typically paler than that of females of the nominate form, and can appear whitish on some individuals (Hill 2002). Although it seems likely that the Lewis Purple Martin was of the nominate race, it has not been possible to establish the racial identification with certainty from the descriptions and photographs available.

The remaining eight species of *Progne* occur throughout Central and South America and are considered most unlikely to occur as vagrants to Europe, although four species have strayed north to the USA. Of these four, three are known only from specimens collected in the late nineteenth century; clearly they do not stray north of their respective breeding ranges regularly. Grey-breasted Martin *P. chalybea* has occurred in Texas on two occasions, in 1880 and 1889, but breeds regularly in northern Mexico to within 150 km of the Texan border. Cuban Martin *P. cryptoleuca* and Southern Martin *P. elegans* have each occurred once, both at Key West, Florida, in 1895 and 1890, respectively. More recently, vagrant Brown-chested Martins *P. tapera* reached Massachusetts in June 1983, and Cape May, New Jersey, in November 1997 (Hill 2002). In addition, Caribbean Martin *P. dominicensis* has strayed north to Bermuda on at least one occasion (Wingate 1964).

### Related weather events in September 2004

Purple Martin is one of the earliest migrants to depart from North America, with most birds moving south from the USA by late August, at a time when Atlantic depressions usually lack the intensity to seriously affect landbird migration or result in transatlantic vagrancy. In late August 2004, however, the eastern seaboard of the USA was affected by the passage of Hurricane Gaston, and it seems certain that this storm was responsible for the appearance of the Lewis Purple Martin, and another on Flores,

Azores, on 6th September 2004 (*Birding World* 17: 381–389).

As Hurricane Gaston moved north along the eastern seaboard of the USA, it maintained warm, humid weather across the easternmost states by delaying the eastward movement of a cold front. By 31st August, this front accelerated eastwards as the storm moved away, preceded by strong, warm, southwest winds. As the storm was absorbed into a developing depression over Newfoundland on 1st September, the winds in this warm sector intensified and extended rapidly across the North Atlantic to reach Ireland and western Scotland on 3rd. The Purple Martin could easily have been swept eastwards in this windflow at speeds up to 28 m/s, and crossed the North Atlantic probably within 36 hours, under a shield of dense cloud close to the frontal system, perhaps making landfall in Scotland a day or two prior to its discovery. The bird on the Azores on 6th could have departed the USA on a more southerly track and perhaps was later able to reorient into the lighter winds and broken cloud of a slow-moving anticyclone over the Azores region.

Such an early date for transatlantic vagrancy is highly unusual. Only 1% of all North American landbird vagrants reaching Britain & Ireland in autumn since 1967 have occurred in the first week of September (Elkins in prep.). However, Purple Martins leave their breeding range in August and tend to concentrate along the coast (Turner & Rose 1989); is it possible that individuals migrating towards the end of their normal passage period are more predisposed to displacement? So, although the timing of the arrival of the Purple Martin on Lewis was exceptionally early for a Nearctic landbird to reach Europe, it does coincide nicely with the species' early departure from the USA.

### Transatlantic vagrancy by North American hirundines

Six species of swallow and martin breed widely throughout eastern North America, and all are long-distance migrants, although some Tree Swallows *Tachycineta bicolor* overwinter in Florida. Of these, only Tree Swallow and Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota* have previously reached Britain, with two (spring) and nine (autumn) accepted records, respectively, to December 2005, although birds from the Nearctic populations of Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* and Sand Martin (Bank Swallow)



*Riparia riparia* could have occurred but been overlooked among their Palearctic counterparts. In fact, the discovery of two Barn Swallows of the distinctive North American form *H. r. erythrogaster*, along with three Tree Swallows, on Flores, Azores, in late October 2005 (Jiguet & Zucca 2005), suggests that this may well be the case. Despite being common and widespread, it is surprising just how few North American hirundines have occurred in Britain when compared with, for example, the number of North American wood-warblers (Parulidae) (125 between 1954 and 2005), and Red-eyed Vireos *Vireo olivaceus* (103 between 1962 and 2005) (Fraser *et al.* 2007). Being powerful fliers perhaps enables hirundines to cope better with the initial displacement, and then to reorientate towards New World wintering regions?

### Previous claims

There have been at least four previous claims of Purple Martin from Britain & Ireland, all of them during the nineteenth century. In each case, there appeared to be sufficient doubt surrounding the circumstances or insufficient evidence to support the record (see Editorial comment, below). The outline details of the rejected claims are as follows:

**1839 or 1840.** Kingstown, Dublin, no date. Specimen now held at the Museum of Science and Art, Dublin. In their review of North American landbirds in western Europe, Alexander & Fitter (1955) commented that 'most writers have sheltered behind "said to have been" shot in Ireland' but add that 'No evidence is adduced to show that it might have been shot anywhere else.'

**1842.** Brent Reservoir, Middlesex (now Greater London). Two Purple Martins, an adult male and a juvenile male, were said to have been shot by John Calvert in September 1842. The specimen of the adult male is now held at Booth Museum, Brighton. Harting (1866) considered that this record may have been fraudulent, and

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commented that Calvert had bought skins of American birds, which he later relaxed for mounting in Britain.

**1854.** West Colne Bridge, near Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, no date. Alexander & Fitter (1955) commented that 'the Huddersfield record is not now provable'.

**1878.** Colchester, Essex, 26th September (Christy 1890).

### Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Norman Elkins for providing a detailed summary of the weather over the North Atlantic in the days leading up to the discovery of the Purple Martin.

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**EDITORIAL COMMENT** Colin Bradshaw, Chairman of the British Birds Rarities Committee, commented: 'The finders of this bird didn't have it easy. Purple Martin is one of those species that birders who travel in North America have seen many of but rarely studied, particularly in the appropriate plumage. Most British birders who have seen Purple Martins will have watched them in spring at

places like High Island, Texas, or Point Pelee, Ontario, when they are around their grandiose nesting towers. We all vow to come back and look at them more closely but few of us ever get round to it as, after all, there is not much to confuse them with in North America. It is even less likely that you will develop familiarity with this species in the autumn, as Purple Martin is an early migrant, most birds already having passed through Cape May, New Jersey, by the beginning of September.

It's debatable whether watching this species in spring helps much when identifying a British vagrant in juvenile plumage, particularly if the situation doesn't allow direct size comparisons with other hirundines. Juvenile Purple Martin is an odd-looking beast; large and stocky with dusky upperparts and breast, pale belly, dark face and a grey collar – it doesn't look at all like an adult male and not even that much like an adult female. If you got the size wrong and saw this bird on a wire, you could easily talk yourself into thinking that you were watching a juvenile Cliff Swallow, which has that same bulky duskiness – although the absence of a pale rump would be a giveaway when it flew.

Bob McGowan, Chairman of the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee, commented: 'In BOURC's September 2005 press release on the admission of Purple Martin to the British List, Chairman Eric Meek rightly described the bird's discovery on Lewis as "one of the outstanding birding moments of recent years".'

From BOURC's viewpoint, the quality of the submitted descriptions and photographs left no doubt as to the bird's identity as a juvenile Purple Martin. The nominate form *P. s. subis* is the most likely transatlantic migrant, with its wider and more easterly distribution. As subspecies are largely separated by size, it was not possible to assign the Lewis bird to a particular race. The Lewis bird and one on the Azores on 6th September 2004 represent the first and second records for the Western Palearctic.

It is curious that there were a number of nineteenth-century claims of this species from the British Isles but none thereafter until the present record. Details on these historical reports are sketchy and often rely on second-hand accounts. Only two records of Purple Martin have appeared in the British List, Dublin 1840 and Huddersfield 1854 (BOU 1915); however, they are listed in an appendix of species "which have been recorded as having been found in the British Isles, but on evidence which the Committee does not regard as entirely satisfactory". Consequently, the species was not mentioned in the BOU's 4th edition of the *Check-list of the Birds of Great Britain and Ireland* (BOU 1952).

The 1842 record of two at Brent Reservoir, Middlesex, has always been doubted, as Yarrell was apparently misled on their provenance (Harting 1866, 1901; Dalgleish 1880). Referring to the specimens in Frederick Bond's collection, Harting (1889) wrote "no-one now believes the story; and there can be no doubt, from the result of enquiries made, that Yarrell's credulity was imposed upon". Regarding the 1878 Colchester report, Christy (1890) quoted Bree as stating that a Captain Dugmore saw one at the barrack exercising ground around 26th September; he comments that this is "very unsatisfactory". Furthermore, Christy mentioned another third-hand account of one shot around forty years earlier on the Stour. To add to the list of doubtful records, one was reputedly shot near Macclesfield, Cheshire (no date), and sold in 1861 (Harting 1901).

In summary, the majority of nineteenth-century reports lacked credibility, even when first mentioned in the literature. Many natural-history dealers and taxidermists were supported by a lucrative trade in birds during that era, and frauds were not unknown. The terminology used by the authors of the reports of Purple Martin indicates that fraud was suspected, or known, in at least one case. Hence, only the Dublin and Huddersfield occurrences were listed by BOU, but only in an appendix of unsatisfactory records. Likewise, Freke (1880) cites only the Dublin and Huddersfield occurrences.

The two confirmed Western Palearctic records in 2005 lend some veracity to the earlier claim of a suspected juvenile on the Azores in September 1996 and perhaps also to the Dublin record, viewed sceptically at the time because transatlantic vagrancy by Purple Martin was considered improbable (Saunders 1899; Ussher & Warren 1900).

# The British Birds Rarities Committee:

## a review of its history, publications and procedures

Alan R. Dean

**ABSTRACT** The origins and history of the BBRC, and some of the influences which have shaped its development, form the core of this review. Also examined are data deriving from its activities and publications; comparisons with the methods and experiences of records committees elsewhere; public perceptions of the procedures for the acquisition and adjudication of records; and the continuing significance of the national records committee.

An editorial in the August 1959 issue of *British Birds* announced the establishment of a 'Rarity Records Committee' and listed 207 species for which future records in Britain and Ireland would be adjudicated and published in an annual report. Thus, assessment and documentation of rare birds in the British Isles were for the first time put on a disciplined, centralised and consistent footing and an era of more dispersed assessment and publication came to an end.

The first report of the 'Rarity Records Committee', as it was known initially, covered the year 1958. It appeared in 1960 (*Brit. Birds* 53: 153–173), dealt with 81 species and extended to 21 pages. More recently, the 48th report of the British Birds Rarities Committee (*Brit. Birds* 100: 16–61, 72–104) dealt with 135 species in 79 larger-format pages. The intervening years witnessed many developments, in the procedures of record assessment, identification standards, perceptions of what constitutes 'a rarity', and in observer attitudes. In parallel, there has been a considerable expansion in the avenues through which individual rarity records are reported and renewed widening in their places of publication. Accompanying this trend, a number of individuals and publications now offer public commentary on the validity of records, procedures for their assessment and the continuing relevance of traditional techniques.

The following account attempts to review some of these developments, to explore influences on the evolution of the BBRC, to examine parameters – relating to birds and observers – which ensue from the assessment process, to discuss past and on-going changes in the attitudes and responses of birdwatchers to the observation and reporting of rare birds, and to assess current perceptions of, and support for, the activities of records committees and the BBRC. An illuminating and detailed analysis of 'The first ten years of the Rarities Committee' was provided by Wallace (1970). Its focus was an appraisal of the committee's stated functions and the information deriving from them, and included a number of fascinating numerical and qualitative indices. A few of its more trenchant statistics are updated here.

In order to provide a balanced historical record, and a meaningful context within which to review more recent developments, the origins and traditional working practices of the committee are described. Since these aspects of the BBRC are well documented, they are treated here succinctly and tabulated where appropriate. To obtain a measure of public perception and opinion, I have canvassed (via questionnaires) a selection of active and experienced observers in Britain. For European and global perspectives – on observer attitudes, record assessment issues and committee procedures – I





67. The BBRC's first Chairman, Phil Hollom (centre), photographed here with Max Nicholson (left, a former editor of *BB*) and Raymond O'Connor (then Director of the BTO), at *BB*'s 75th party, at the Scotch Whisky Association's premises in Half Moon Street, off Piccadilly, London, June 1982.

have contacted observers from Ireland, mainland Europe, Australia, North America and the constituent committees of the Association of European Records and Rarities Committees (AERC).

Many issues are matters of historical fact and are reported accordingly. Several issues are more contentious and, particularly in more recent years, have aroused considerable debate and disagreement. Occasionally, I have expressed personal observations on these and other issues; so that these personal asides may be readily identified as subjective, they are set in italics.

### The Committee

#### Rare-bird documentation and the origins of BBRC

An inventory of rare birds in Britain and Ireland up to 1940 can be found within the systematic list and the paragraphs on distribution in *The Handbook of British Birds* (Witherby *et al.* 1938–1941). Ignoring discredited records, such as 'The Hastings Rarities' (Nelder 1962; Nicholson & Ferguson-Lees 1962), *The Handbook* lists totals for 68 species where fewer than 14 individuals had been recorded, while a further 86 species are coded as 'vagrant', 'rare vagrant' or 'very rare vagrant'. For 16 of these species, details are imprecise but, up to 1940, the remaining 138 species accumulated a total in the order of just 2,500 individuals. The listed records were harvested from a wide range of

publications, including early national and regional avifaunas, *British Birds*, *The Zoologist*, *Ibis*, and the *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*. (See Evans (1991) and Naylor (1996) for modern inventories.)

Between 1940 and 1960, the number of observers increased substantially, in tandem with improving identification skills, experience abroad of species scarce in Britain, and an expanding number of bird observatories at key migration sites. By the late 1950s, *The Handbook's* inventory was no longer representative, as reports of species perceived as rare grew to around 400 indi-

viduals of 75 species annually. Their places of publication remained diverse and included an increasing number of county bird reports. Assessment of the acceptability of claims rested with the editorial teams of these various publications. Details of the rarest species were published in *British Birds*, and were thus subject to a further tier of editorial vetting, while a summary of lesser rarities was provided in a feature entitled 'Recent reports and news'. Nevertheless, publication of records of rarities nationwide remained piecemeal and adjudication standards were correspondingly inconsistent. In 1959, recognising that this situation was unsustainable, the editors of *British Birds* conceived the idea of a national Rarity Records Committee (*Brit. Birds* 52: 241–244).

**Table 1.** A summary of the aims and objectives of the Rarities Committee as implied in its first report, in 1960 (after Wallace 1970).

- To cope with the enormously increased number of observations of rare birds at a national level.
- To assess rarity records uniformly and not by the inevitably varying standards of the different county reports alone.
- To bring together all the well-authenticated records in one place so that the general picture emerges.
- To pass on to observers the knowledge gained from its work in the form of a thorough reappraisal of the identification criteria of particular groups.

### *Aims and objectives*

The original aims and objectives of the committee were discussed in the introduction to the first 'Report on rare birds in Great Britain and Ireland' (*Brit. Birds* 53: 153–173). From this text, a précis of key statements of intent was extracted by Wallace (1970). This remains a useful summary of the committee's initial rationale and its headings are reproduced in Table 1.

### *Membership*

From its inception, the committee has comprised ten voting members. Originally, both Chairman and Secretary were part of the voting complement but, from the mid 1970s, the Secretary (constitutionally) and the Chairman (intermittently, and at their own instigation) have occupied non-voting roles.

Six Chairmen and seven Honorary Secretaries have served the committee, while an additional 53 individuals have occupied record-assessment and voting roles (Appendix 1). A glance through Appendix 1 reveals the calibre of the committee's membership through nearly five decades, with many of the luminaries of British field observation and identification figuring among its members. This is observed not as an accolade but as a measure of the

breadth of knowledge and experience which has been brought to the task of record assessment. A particular tribute is due, however, to Mike Rogers, who was Hon. Secretary of the BBRC from 1978 until his death in 2006. For 29 years he was responsible for receiving submissions, marshalling them into geographical- or species-related batches, circulating them to voting members, collating the resulting decisions, and compiling the draft of the annual report. It is sometimes forgotten that, during much of this era, such tasks were of necessity labour-intensive. Much has changed during these 29 years but Mike Rogers's contribution to the work of the BBRC cannot be overestimated.

### *Constitution and procedures*

The constitution of the BBRC and its traditional procedures for the acquisition and assessment of records have been explained on several occasions (see, for example, Lansdown 1987 & 1993). They appear on the committee's website (<http://www.bbrc.org.uk>) and are summarised in Appendix 2.

### *History, influences and developments*

Since the committee's history spans nearly half a century, its evolution has been influenced by social and technological changes as well as by



Richard Chandler

68. The British Birds Rarities Committee, at the annual meeting in March 1989. From left, Richard Chandler (BB representative), Peter Colston (then BBRC's Archivist and Museum Consultant), Chris Heard, John Marchant, Mike Rogers (then Hon. Secretary), Keith Vinicombe, Peter Lansdown (then BBRC Chairman), Steve Gantlett, Alan Dean, Dave Britton and Tim Sharrock (then BB Editor). Members of the committee unable to attend this meeting were Alan Brown and Rob Hume.





69. Peter J. Grant, BBRC Chairman from 1976 to 1986, photographed here in 1981 at his regular patch of Dungeness, Kent.

purely ornithological factors. Developments have been both proactive and reactive. Under P. A. D. Hollom's chairmanship, the 1960s was a period of consolidation, with working procedures and the format of the yearly 'Report on rare birds in Great Britain' being firmly established and the role of the committee as arbiter of the national rarity record seldom questioned. In his analysis of its first ten years, Wallace (1970) concluded that the BBRC had been broadly successful in achieving its stated objectives – provisos concerned the discarding of several species from the list of those considered and limited publication of identification texts.

#### *The BBRC database: identification, status and statistics*

The issue of identification papers was addressed during Wallace's own tenure as Chairman during the early and mid 1970s. Refinements in identification criteria, drawing heavily upon the BBRC archives, led to a series of papers, which were later to form the core of a compendium entitled *Frontiers of Bird Identification* (Sharrock 1980). Of the 29 papers in this work, all but two were authored or co-authored by existing or forthcoming members of the BBRC. Between them, Ian Wallace and Peter Grant (Ian's successor as Chairman) were involved with 21 contributions

This increased dissemination of information was complemented by the inclusion in the 'Rarities Report' of statistics indicating the status of each species, an innovation suggested and implemented by David Britton. From the report

for 1976 onwards, the heading for each species' account listed 'the total number of individuals recorded in Britain (i) to the end of 1957, (ii) for the period since the formation of the Rarities Committee in 1958, but excluding (iii) those listed for the current year'. Following AERC recommendations, the statistics were backdated to 1950 and these first appeared in the 2005 report (see also Wallace *et al.* 2006). Meanwhile, full analyses of the temporal and geographical distributions of scarce and rare birds in Britain and Ireland were published. Using

data from the BBRC annual report, the *Irish Bird Report* and (for non-BBRC species) records culled from county bird reports, the distributions of scarce migrants during 1958–67 (Sharrock 1974) and rare birds during 1958–72 (Sharrock & Sharrock 1976) were portrayed graphically. At the close of the 1970s, the accounts of the committee were in good order. From 1983, increased financial support for the work and publications of the BBRC was forthcoming, via sponsorship from the optical company Carl Zeiss Ltd.

#### *Internationalism and 'The New Approach'*

Increasingly, widening horizons among bird-watchers were reflected by exchanges of knowledge and ideas with observers overseas. This was manifested most clearly in a series of 'International Identification Meetings' during the first six years of the 1980s. The 4th International Meeting, held at Eilat, Israel, in November 1986, was attended by 24 delegates from 12 countries, including Peter Grant, Alan Harris and Tim Sharrock from England and Killian Mullarney from Ireland. Its proceedings were published under the title *International Bird Identification* (Grant *et al.* 1987). Within this more dynamic and international approach lay the beginnings of a new philosophy of bird identification and, by implication, the standards by which records of rare birds should be judged. In Britain, this development was closely associated with Peter Grant, who was Chairman of the BBRC from 1976 to 1986. Peter's reputation as an identification expert was recognised inter-



nationally following publication in 1982 of his ground-breaking book *Gulls: a guide to identification* (originally published as a series of papers in *British Birds* during 1978–81). Peter Lansdown (*in litt.*) has commented: 'Peter Grant was widely acknowledged as the prime forward-thinking identification expert in the UK. That he was also a good organiser, popular, enthusiastic, really comfortable with people and a willing and quick worker on paper made him a natural chairman for the BBRC.' His chairmanship ushered in exciting times, with some long-standing identification problems being tackled with renewed vigour and optimism, and the birding community generally comfortable with the direction of the BBRC. It is ironic, therefore, that this period also sowed the seeds of a schism within the ranks of rare-bird enthusiasts and identification protagonists.

Radical changes in the design of optics during the 1970s and 1980s led, in particular, to the emergence of compact, high-resolution telescopes. For many birders, use of a telescope became routine rather than an intermittent (and cumbersome) procedure. As well as providing enhanced enjoyment of all species, this enabled differences between closely similar species to be investigated with renewed purpose. Detailed observations of state of moult and fine plumage detail became possible during normal field conditions and were no longer the sole province of ringers and museum workers. New (or sometimes 'rediscovered') criteria began to evolve for distinguishing the members of difficult species-groups, such as stints *Calidris*, the immature plumages of gulls (Laridae), and certain warblers (Sylviidae). Identification by precise examination of plumage minutiae was nowhere better illustrated than in the paper 'Identification of stints and peeps' (Grant & Jonsson 1984), with Lars Jonsson's superb and meticulous illustrations depicting the diagnostic feather detail of each species with both precision and artistry. Real advances in knowledge were emerging and many birders were enthused with the potential of the new approach. Since its techniques were founded upon specific plumage marks, such as the colour and patterning of tertial fringes or the internal markings of wing-coverts and scapulars, it was advocated as objective and reliable. Among some birders, and almost by default, earlier approaches to identification became regarded as error-prone. Evaluations of

more general features, such as overall shape, relative proportions, prominent markings, and basic distribution of colour, were perceived as subjective and, in consequence, unreliable. Published correspondence (e.g. *Brit. Birds* 77: 16, 204; 78: 356–357) demonstrated the valuable contributions which each approach brought to bird identification, but the perception remained that the newer methods had displaced earlier techniques. Identification based upon the minutiae of plumage, structure and moult became known as 'The New Approach', taken from the title of a series of papers in *Birding World* (and later a pamphlet, published in 1989) by Peter Grant and Killian Mullarney. More traditional practice, evaluating the unique character of a species from a synthesis of its essential shape, patterning and behaviour, was christened by its advocates as 'The Holistic Approach', and was a close relative of identification by 'jizz'. Each having acquired a soubriquet, it was inevitable that the two approaches would be viewed by some as in conflict. The debate over their relative strengths and weaknesses diminished through the 1990s but still reappears on occasion (see Wallace 2004).

*The discord which sometimes attends this debate is surely misplaced, and implies an artificial dichotomy, as the correspondence cited earlier demonstrates. When identifying commoner and relatively familiar species, a holistic approach is clearly sensible and practical. This 'fast-tracking' of identification relies on evident field marks (in the mode of the Peterson series of field guides) and on overall 'jizz'. Such a 'ready-reckoner' technique will have a high rate of success in processing the relatively large numbers of identifications which birdwatchers make during a day in the field. The consequences of an isolated misidentification, among a host of relatively common species, are of no great significance. When encountering a rare (and less familiar) species, especially a species difficult to distinguish from congeners, then the holistic approach is less appropriate, as the consequences of a mistake are now significant. The holistic approach will often be instrumental in the initial detection of 'something different' but establishing a critical identification beyond doubt requires a change of technique, to the more precise and detailed methods of 'The New Approach'. I am sure that most birdwatchers employ both techniques in this way, more-or-less instinctively. Furthermore, behavioural traits and vocalisations (such as tail*

*movements and calls among Hippoboscids warblers are emerging as key identification characters which bridge the two approaches.*

#### *Identification standards and public relations*

The undoubted advances deriving from 'The New Approach' were accompanied by some unpredictable ramifications. Coincident with these developments in identification techniques were new avenues for the dissemination of rare-bird news and the discussion of identification matters. Telephone-based news services were established and magazines such as *Birding World* (and later *Birdwatch*) placed a considerable focus on rare birds. With their emphasis on topicality, these newer publications offered an immediacy which was denied to the more academic and peer-reviewed heritage of *British Birds*, where full details of rare birds and the circumstances of their occurrence were published only after proper adjudication by the BBRC and, where appropriate, the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC). This disciplined and rigorous approach to the validity of its publications was, and remains, fully justified but inevitably introduces a time lag between occurrence and publication. More recent converts to birding especially became focused on the rapid publication of reports of rare birds and were sometimes disenchanted when records, which they had already seen in print, were judged unacceptable by the BBRC and failed to appear in the 'Report on rare birds in Great Britain'. A misconception arose that, to be accepted, *all* claims must be supported by descriptions steeped in the technicalities of 'The New Approach'. This affected not only less experienced birdwatchers but also some more seasoned observers, especially seawatchers. Seabirds observed from coastal watchpoints were inevitably identified at relatively long range, using features owing more to the holistic approach than to observation of fine detail. Several seabird specialists misinterpreted the rejection of a number of claims and inferred that the BBRC was no longer responsive to, nor conversant with, the techniques of seabird identification. They threatened to withhold their records from the committee (and hence from the national archive).

Recognising the dangers of factionalism, the BBRC worked to forge closer links with observers. Peter Lansdown, Chairman of the

BBRC during 1986–93, spoke at several conferences and met with identifiable groups of observers, in order to explain more fully the committee's operations and encourage the continued submission of records. To meet the concerns of seawatchers, a Seabirds Advisory Panel (SAP) was established in 1987, with Peter Harrison as Secretary. In 1993, the BBRC introduced a new series in *British Birds* entitled 'From the Rarities Committee's files', designed to better illustrate the committee's operations and to provide guidance on the qualities of successful submissions. This feature also served to publicise and explain improved identification criteria and to provide an archive of current standards of documentation and adjudication. Forging better links and increased openness continued under Rob Hume's chairmanship during the mid 1990s, with a focus on discussing difficult and contentious records becoming evident in 'From the Rarities Committee's files'; the dark-rumped petrel *Oceanodroma* observed at sea off Cornwall during August 1988 (the so-called 'Chalice petrel') being perhaps the most famous and dramatic example (*Brit. Birds* 90: 305–313).

A better understanding of records committees' operations and their founding on commonly agreed principles followed the establishment of the AERC in 1993. With European and North American participation, a document entitled 'Guidelines for rarities committees' was produced (*Brit. Birds* 86: 301–302; <http://www.aerc.eu/Guidelines.htm>). The 'Guidelines', already broadly compatible with the committee's procedures, were endorsed by the BBRC. It was now a matter of public record that the operations of the BBRC and kindred committees followed principles agreed and implemented internationally.

#### *The electronic and digital revolution*

With better public-relations procedures in place, and misconceptions allayed if not completely dispelled, revised concerns for the committee through the 1990s included the efficiency of its procedures to deal with an increasing workload, and the speed of processing records and publishing decisions. To improve throughput of records, a system of fast-tracking was introduced, whereby more straightforward records were dealt with by a subcommittee of five members and circulated to the full committee only if problems were



encountered. As had happened previously, a number of species, which were proving commoner than hitherto, were discarded from the BBRC list. Responsibility for their vetting passed to county records committees, while a summary of their status continued to appear in *British Birds* in the 'Report on scarce birds in Britain', authored by Peter Fraser and Mike Rogers.

More significantly, the beginnings of change in the type of documentation submitted became evident. During the early and mid 1990s, records received by the committee included: 'A few videos, almost no digital pictures but certainly a gradual increase in normal photographic documentation' (Rob Hume *in litt.*). Within a few years, technological changes in the world at large were dramatic, with e-mail, the internet and digital optics becoming central to communications and media. The emergence of digital photography, and digiscoping, signalled an era where photography of rare birds became the norm and images of rare birds appeared on the internet within hours of a bird's discovery, and appeared in print well before details had been submitted, processed and published by the BBRC.

In addition, the traditional procedures of the BBRC were established in the 'paper-based' era and upon detailed written documentation. It was clear that adapting to electronic methods was overdue. A fascinating perspective on some of the issues and soul-searching during this period is included in Rob Hume's book, *Life with Birds* (2005). During the opening years of the new millennium, under the chairmanship of Colin Bradshaw, the conversion to electronic format of BBRC methodologies for the submission and adjudication of claims has been largely completed (*Brit. Birds* 99: 225). More traditional lines of communication remain available, so that less IT-oriented observers are not disenfranchised. The preoc-

cupation with digital photographs and a declining enthusiasm for field notes define the current concern of the BBRC and all records committees: how to adapt acceptable standards of documentation to the digital age while safeguarding the integrity and value of the archive.

#### *Taxonomic turbulence and RIACT*

Among the most dramatic changes in recent ornithology has been the re-evaluation of taxonomic relationships based on molecular studies, especially DNA-sequence data (for an accessible summary see Maclean *et al.* 2005). This has led to a re-evaluation of species limits and relationships, and the elevation of a number of forms from subspecies to full species. Taxonomic decisions affecting the British List reside with the BOURC, on the recommendation of its Taxonomic Sub-committee (TSC); for Western Palearctic taxa that are outside the remit of the BOURC, recommendations of the Taxonomic Advisory Committee (TAC) of the AERC are normally followed (Collinson 2006). Universal agreement upon species concepts and which forms warrant recognition as full species remains a distant prospect and, for its own



Peter Kennerley

**70.** Current BBRC member Brian Small digiscoping in his home county of Suffolk, February 2007. This photograph nicely encapsulates two of the key technological advances in bird identification of the past two or three decades: a marked improvement in the optical quality (and portability) of modern telescopes, and the now widespread use of digital cameras and video-recorders, which have arguably (and unfortunately) sounded the death knell for the routine use of field notebooks.



decisions, the TSC has formulated 'Guidelines for assigning species rank' (Helbig *et al.* 2002; Collinson 2002). For birders and ornithologists, these taxonomic upheavals have led to a realignment of focus, from species and subspecies to 'diagnosable taxa', and a recognition that taxa currently regarded as subspecies warrant greater attention than they have received hitherto. The BBRC has long deliberated claims of races rarely encountered in Britain but, historically, has restricted this to forms with clearly distinctive features. With reports of a wider range of subspecies being submitted, and the taxonomic status of some forms liable to change, the BBRC in 1999 established a subcommittee charged with investigating 'Racial Identification Among Changing Taxonomy' (RIACT) and with developing criteria for identifying rare subspecies in Britain (*Brit. Birds* 92: 546, 96: 543, 97: 559). Recognising the special requirements of this task, the subcommittee freely co-opts specialists from outside BBRC ranks to assist with the investigation of individual forms or groups. On behalf of the BBRC, Kehoe (2006) recently provided a full discussion of the committee's approach to the recording and assessment of rare races that would otherwise not fall within the BBRC's remit. The committee has introduced a system of 'informal reporting' of suspected extralimital races for which diagnosis currently remains uncertain, whereby reports can be submitted without being subjected to the formal adjudication process. The information resulting from such informal reports will provide a valuable resource in the on-going investigation of identification criteria.

### The current focus

During its 2004 annual meeting, the BBRC re-examined its constitution and objectives. A subsequent article entitled 'What does the British Birds Rarities Committee do?' (*Brit. Birds* 97: 260–263) included a tabulation of its refined aims and objectives and is repeated here as table 2.

In July 2006, Colin Bradshaw (*in litt.*) listed the current aspirations of the committee, of which the following is an edited summary:

- the transition of BBRC to a modern, responsive organisation, which still assesses records rigorously but delivers its results in an open and timely manner;
- submission of records in electronic format,

including e-mail, to be the norm, rather than the exception, and to facilitate this by providing a system for easy submission from various birding websites;

- computerisation of the committee's data and archives, so that they are secure and accessible to analysis;
- recruitment of new members with less of an establishment profile, and harnessing the energy and enthusiasm of younger observers;
- more explicit definition and documentation of the committee's procedures and administration, to secure public confidence in its impartiality and independence;
- enhanced autonomy, both logistic and financial.

Several of these objectives are near completion while others remain on the agenda. Not all are without their critics but the merit of the underlying intention, to achieve a modern and responsive committee, is incontestable.

### The 'Report on rare birds in Great Britain' Contents and style

The annual report on rare birds comprises introductory comment, a systematic list of accepted records, supplemented by interpretative comments, and a series of appendices (listing, respectively, accepted records of species in Category D; records not accepted; records

**Table 2.** The aims and objectives of the BBRC (after Bradshaw *et al.* 2004).

BBRC aims to maintain an accurate database of records of the occurrence of rare taxa in Britain, in order to enable individuals or organisations to assess the current status of, and any changes in, the patterns of occurrence and distribution of these taxa in Britain.

To support this aim, BBRC will strive to:

- work closely with County Recorders, Bird Observatories and observers to ensure that all records of rare taxa are submitted to this database;
- provide interested parties with an accurate and complete annual report detailing records of rare taxa in Britain;
- continue to vet all records of rare taxa in an independent, open, rigorous and consistent manner, and to provide observers with feedback on the assessment process as appropriate;
- continue to develop and publish criteria for the identification of rare taxa and to provide relevant information to other observers who wish to do this in partnership with the Committee.

not accepted but identification proved (generally species regarded as escapees); and selected records still under consideration). The report includes drawings, paintings and photographs of a selection of individual rarities, and occasional maps and graphs. The systematic list of accepted records is naturally the focus and generally occupies around 85% of the report. However, the value of the appendices should not be underestimated, in particular the listing of records not accepted. It is sometimes overlooked that this is an informative part of the archive. Clearly, it places on record reports which

might prove worthy of reconsideration in the light of new information. Additionally, it highlights persistent difficulties surrounding certain species, reveals trends on moving identification standards, and hints at variations in identification and vetting procedures at regional level.

Records from Ireland have appeared in the report, in various formats, through much of the committee's history but problems have beset their inclusion from as early as 1960 (*Brit. Birds* 54: 173–200). After a chequered history, Irish records were formally excluded from the species statistics from 2001 onwards, following representations from the Irish Rare Birds Committee and a decision by the BOURC to exclude Irish records from its reports (*Brit. Birds* 95: 477).

### The number and range of species

In the 7th edition of 'The British List: a checklist of birds of Britain' (Dudley *et al.* 2006), the BOURC accredits 572 species. Since 1959, and including nine species merely locally rare which featured initially on its list, the ambit of the BBRC has included over 340 species, which is approaching 60% of the British List. The committee has also adjudicated records of at least 24 distinctive races and claims of a number of species which have yet to be accepted onto the British List (South Polar Skua *Stercorarius mac-*

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**71.** This page from the BirdGuides website represents the latest stage of the BBRC's adaptation to technological change. Birders submitting a digital photograph of a rarity to BirdGuides will be given the option of submitting it for BBRC assessment simultaneously; in some cases, a digital photograph, along with other basic details such as the name of the observer, the date and the location, may be sufficient for an acceptable biological record.

*cormicki* being an example of a species with a number of claims and one which has occupied the committee for a considerable number of hours).

Various species have, over the years, proved to be commoner than hitherto. In consequence, claims of such species have generated an undue proportion of the committee's workload, consuming time that would be better spent upon more appropriate species and identification research. During the 1970s, the annual total of records submitted reached 500 and by 1990 had risen to over 1,000. On these and other occasions, the imbalance has been addressed by re-evaluating what constitutes a 'rarity' and removing from the list those taxa appearing with greatest frequency. At various times up to 2006, the committee has removed a total of 52 taxa from its list. The committee's current criteria remove those species for which there have been at least 200 British records in total and at least 100 records during the previous ten years (*Brit. Birds* 99: 52). The latest series of demonstrations, of 17 species from 1st January 2006, is calculated to reduce by half the level of around 800 submissions prevailing in 2000.

The list of taxa considered by the BBRC as of 1st January 2006 comprised 284 species and 21 distinctive races; of these, 52% were passerines



and 48% non-passerines; 56% were of fundamentally Palearctic origin, 35% Nearctic, 8% Holarctic and 1% sub-Saharan or southern Atlantic.

### Facts and figures

Dymond *et al.* (1989) remains the most recent analysis of the temporal and geographical distributions of species, and an update is now due. The following commentary makes no attempt to pre-empt that demanding task but examines some of the broader information deriving from the committee's files. Its conclusions are based upon a detailed analysis of the rarity reports for 2000–04.

### Statistical preamble

The statistics are derived from all published records for 2000–04, up to and including late acceptances and non-acceptances appearing in

the report for 2005. A small number of records from earlier years are still under consideration by the committee but will not unduly influence the analysis. As in all such exercises, the numbers should not be regarded as absolute but will be sufficiently precise to portray patterns and trends with accuracy. In general, the figures here relate to totals of individual birds, since a small percentage of records involve more than one individual.

In general, an individual bird is included only once, for the original sighting. Individuals moving between locations or counties, or reappearing in subsequent years, are not re-entered into the figures. The exception to this is the data for 'acceptance rates' from individual counties. Where an individual bird is recorded and identified independently in two or more counties, then it has been logged as an 'accepted record' for each county. To do otherwise would

deplete unfairly the ratio of acceptance to non-acceptance for some counties.

On an allied note, mapping of the distribution of records follows the counties and recording areas which appeared in the five BBRC reports. The selection of counties and the associated boundaries in the reports are somewhat idiosyncratic, reflecting the confused (and overlapping) boundaries which pervade ornithological recording in the UK. This has necessitated several boundaries being added manually to a base map generated using Alan Morton's DMAP distribution-mapping software. The map has been modified to meet the current need and should not be regarded as an accurate portrayal of county boundaries nor as an endorsement of the implied recording units. Clearly, there is a need for a nationally agreed system of regional recording units and an appropriate map, accessible from the website of one of the senior ornithological bodies.

### The distribution of rare birds

It is long established that the distribution of vagrant species



Hugh Harrop

**72.** Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*, Voe, Shetland, October 2005. This drab-looking *Phylloscopus* was removed from the list of species considered by BBRC on 1st January 2006. Twenty years earlier, it was still considered a great rarity; prior to 1987, BBRC statistics showed that there were on average fewer than two accepted records per year. Since then, the annual average has been over 13, and as well as autumn migrants there are occasional records of wintering birds; see the discussion on p. 91 for some possible reasons for this surge in records.



within Britain is highly uneven, with archipelagos and east- and south-facing coasts receiving a higher proportion than inland areas and west-facing coasts. This pattern was reconfirmed by the number of rarities accepted by the BBRC in each county during 2000–04 (fig. 1).

Fourteen counties combined produced nearly 65% of the British total, while just four counties accounted for 34% (table 3). Shetland was by some way the most productive area, followed by Norfolk, Scilly and Cornwall. In his 1970 analysis, Wallace showed that Shetland and Scilly were the most productive areas through the 1960s, with Norfolk in third place. Norfolk has now displaced Scilly as the second most-productive region during the early 2000s. It should be noted, however, that pelagics from Scilly into Sea Area Sole produced 126 rare seabirds (93% Wilson's Storm-petrels *Oceanites oceanicus*) and, if these were added to the Scilly total, then the combined region would (just) reclaim second position. Additionally, within what remain the best areas collectively, changes in relative productivity are not surprising. Species such as

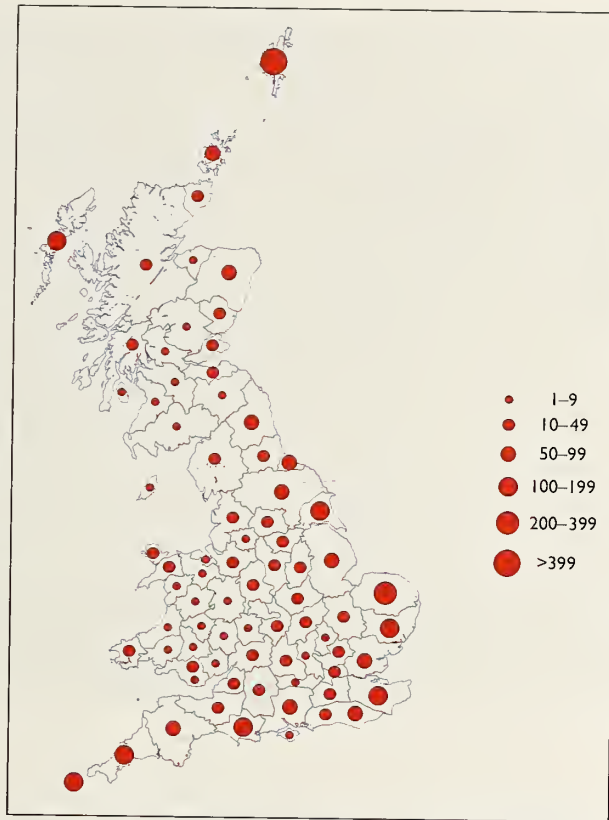


Fig. 1. Distribution by county of rare birds in Britain accepted by BBRC, 2000–04.

Table 3. Most productive counties for rare birds in Britain, 2000–04.

County	Number of individual rarities	Percentage of British total
Shetland	483	14.4
Norfolk	296	8.8
Scilly	179	5.3
Cornwall	172	5.1
Kent	140	4.2
Suffolk	128	3.8
East Yorkshire	121	3.6
Dorset	111	3.3
Outer Hebrides	105	3.1
Orkney	99	2.9
Devon	91	2.7
Northumberland	85	2.5
Essex	80	2.4
Lincolnshire	79	2.4

Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi* and Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*, which produced multiple records during the 1960s, are no longer considered by the BBRC, while other influences include observer numbers, their geographical distribution overall and observer focus during the migration seasons.

In his analysis of BBRC data collected during the first ten years, Wallace explicitly identified the 13 most productive counties, of which 11 are shared with table 3, county-boundary changes notwithstanding. If their totals were combined, East Sussex and West Sussex would achieve joint 11th place in table 3 and the two inventories would share 12 counties. Thus, minor placement changes apart, the distribution of rare birds across Britain remains broadly similar nearly 40 years on. Orkney and the Western Isles have now entered the listing of premier sites. Increased and systematic observation on these two archipelagos is undoubtedly the reason for their increased productivity. The only 'land-locked' county in the top 25 is Cambridgeshire.

**Table 4.** Annual total claims and acceptance rates, 2000–04 (A: accepted, N: not accepted).

Year Status	2000		2001		2002		2003		2004	
	A	N	A	N	A	N	A	N	A	N
Number of individuals	717	208	614	172	636	160	667	119	625	112
Percentage	77.5	22.5	78.1	21.9	79.9	20.1	84.9	15.1	84.8	15.2

*Acceptance rates for species*

During 2000–04, records processed by the committee totalled just over 4,000 individuals of 236 taxa (including ten species in Category D but excluding six species considered to be escapees). Overall, 80.9% were accepted and the mean annual acceptance rate was 81.0%. The figures for the five years are presented in table 4.

The percentage of records accepted has shown a slight increase over the five years, while the mean acceptance rate of 81.0% is in line with the long-term trend. Acceptance rates, inevitably excluding records still in circulation, were routinely published in the report up to 1992 but, regrettably, have not appeared since. The mean of these unadjusted rates during 1988–92 was 81.2%, nearly identical with the mean acceptance rate during 2000–04. A number of more regular species have been dropped from the list during the intervening period, several (although by no means all) of which have been species presenting few identification problems. With the removal of these species, the acceptance rate might have been expected to fall. Care has to be taken using unadjusted figures but there is no indication that rates of acceptance have fallen, which belies assertions in some quarters that the committee has raised its standards unduly.

Acceptance rates for individual species spanned the full range from zero (none accepted) up to 100% (all accepted). The proportion of claims accepted provides a useful indicator of problematic species and of observers' appreciation of their decisive field characters. The rate of acceptance for the greatest rarities is inherently volatile (for species claimed just once in the five-year period, the rate will be either zero or 100%). Meaningful conclusions emerge only for species claimed more frequently and, in drawing attention to the acceptance rates for particular species, I have highlighted only taxa claimed at least five times during the five years. In passing, however, it may be noted that 78 species boasted 100% acceptance, of which 65 were recorded on five or fewer occasions and 39 just once. This group

included the headline-making 'species new to Britain', such as Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*, Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii*, Grey Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis*, Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus* and Chestnut-eared Bunting *Emberiza fucata*. At the other end of the scale, of 38 taxa reported during the five years but with no records accepted, 28 were claimed on only a single occasion (and included several species not yet on the British List) while eight taxa failed on two or three occasions.

Table 5 lists the 14 species claimed on five or more occasions during 2000–04 and attaining 100% acceptance. Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* tops the list of consistently successful species, with 103 claims all accepted. Recent clarification (but not full resolution) of the differences between eastern and western forms of Subalpine Warbler suggests that more than one species may be involved. Similarly, there are several forms of Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*, some of which may warrant recognition as full species. Their racial identification, particularly in first-winter plumage, remains challenging. The BBRC already scrutinises descriptions of these two species for subspecific

**Table 5.** Taxa claimed on five or more occasions during 2000–04 and attaining 100% acceptance (hybrid Black Ducks are excluded).

Species	No. individuals recorded
Subalpine Warbler <i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	103
Radde's Warbler <i>Phylloscopus schwarzi</i>	68
Arctic Warbler <i>Phylloscopus borealis</i>	33
Red-eyed Vireo <i>Vireo olivaceus</i>	19
Isabelline Shrike <i>Lanius isabellinus</i>	16
Pied Wheatear <i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i>	12
Lesser Grey Shrike <i>Lanius minor</i>	10
Black Duck <i>Anas rubripes</i>	11
Red-flanked Bluetail <i>Tarsiger cyanurus</i>	9
White-throated Sparrow <i>Zonotrichia albicollis</i>	8
Pine Bunting <i>Emberiza leucocephalos</i>	8
Terek Sandpiper <i>Xenus cinereus</i>	7
Swainson's Thrush <i>Catharus ustulatus</i>	6
Sykes's Warbler <i>Hippolais rama</i>	5



Iain Leach

**73.** First-winter female Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*, Newbiggin, Northumberland, October 2004.

Perhaps surprisingly, this species is one of 14 for which the acceptance rate has been 100% in the past five years (2000–04), and for which there have been claims of five or more individuals (table 5). Although adult males are distinctive and striking, first-winter females such as this might have been expected to cause more problems than they apparently do; this suggests that all claims are coming from experienced observers well acquainted with the identification literature.

features but this does not hinder the publication of accepted records. However, taxonomic reassessments may enforce a further layer of complexity upon their adjudication in due course.

That Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* and Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* have proved consistently successful is perhaps sur-

prising. Confusion between Arctic Warbler and Greenish Warbler *Ph. trochiloides* remains a danger (*Brit. Birds* 94: 492), while female and immature Pied Wheatear and eastern Black-eared Wheatear *Oe. hispanica melanoleuca* are readily confusable. This suggests that reports of these two species generally stem from experienced observers, fully aware of the identifica-

**Table 6.** Taxa claimed on five or more occasions during 2000–04 and attaining the lowest acceptance rates (A: accepted, N: not accepted).

	Total A	Total N	%A	%N
Nutcracker <i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>	0	6	0	100
Parrot Crossbill <i>Loxia pytyopsittacus</i>	0	15	0	100
North Atlantic Little Shearwater <i>Puffinus baroli</i>	1	8	11.1	88.9
Black-eared Wheatear <i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	2	9	18.2	81.8
American Robin <i>Turdus migratorius</i>	3	9	25.0	75.0
'American Herring Gull' <i>Larus argentatus smithsonianus</i>	3	6	33.3	66.7
'Black-headed Wagtail' <i>Motacilla flava feldegg</i>	2	3	40.0	60.0
Black Kite <i>Milvus migrans</i>	60	85	41.4	58.6
Gull-billed Tern <i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	12	16	42.9	57.1
Gyr Falcon <i>Falco rusticolus</i>	13	16	44.8	55.2
Great Snipe <i>Gallinago media</i>	13	16	44.8	55.2
Slender-billed Gull <i>Larus genei</i>	3	3	50.0	50.0





74. Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, Moore, Cheshire, May 2005.

Although removed from the BBRC list on 1st January 2006, this species will perhaps be the least straightforward for county and regional committees to deal with. The failure rate for recent claims has been nearly 60%, despite an average of almost 30 submissions per year (see *Brit Birds* 96: 560).

tion pitfalls. In contrast, Black-eared Wheatear appears in the list of species with the *lowest* acceptance rates. Among less-experienced observers, claims of female and first-winter male Black-eared are beset, additionally, by confusion with Northern Wheatear *Oe. oenanthe* (see Clement 1987), which no doubt explains this apparent incongruity.

Table 6 lists the 12 taxa claimed on five or

more occasions during 2000–04 which attained the *lowest* acceptance rates. Unspecified 'dowitchers' *Limnodromus* and 'Bonelli's warblers' *Ph. bonelli* or *Ph. orientalis* were also claimed on five occasions but succeeded only once. Two species were claimed on five or more occasions, none of which were accepted. Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes* has a long history of failed claims, many of which stem from less-experienced observers (when confusion with Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* is not infrequently suspected!). During 2000–04, claims of Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus* numbered five, including flocks of five and seven, and all were from Scotland. Despite recent advances in understanding of the characters and biology of Parrot and Scottish Crossbill *L. scotica*, their differentiation in the field remains problematic at best. Of the remaining species with a high proportion of failed claims, North Atlantic Little Shearwater *Puffinus baroli* has the lowest acceptance rate, of 11% from just nine claims. More concerning perhaps are the high rejection rates for the more frequently claimed Great Snipe *Gallinago media*, Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*, Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus* and Black Kite *Milvus migrans*. All 12 of the taxa in table 6 have common (or commoner) confu-

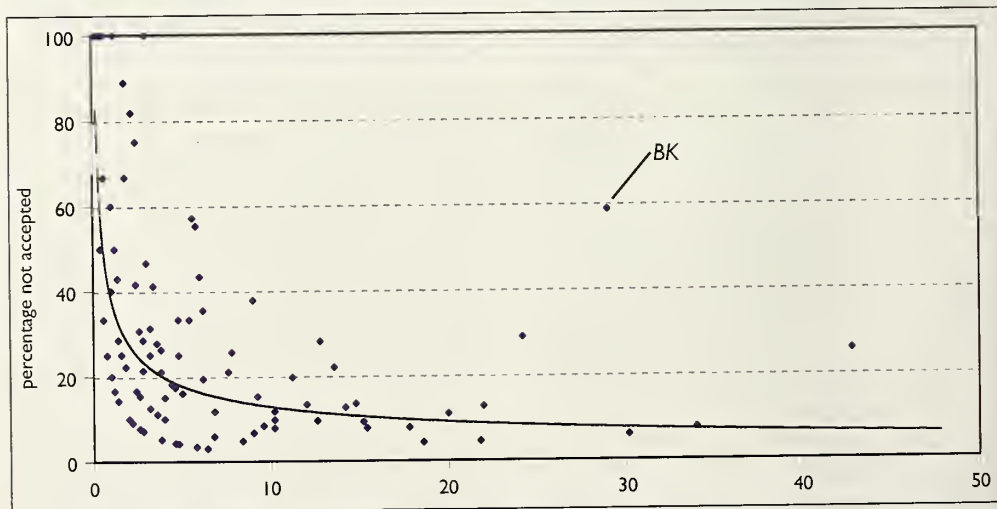


Fig. 2. Non-acceptance rate in relation to mean annual number of claims (for all species which failed to be accepted at least once during 2000–04). BK = Black Kite (see text).

sion species and, despite their identification having been addressed in a number of texts, they remain problematic.

Non-acceptance rate in relation to 'number of individuals claimed' for *all* species is displayed in fig. 2. The trend line demonstrates that species reported more frequently have relatively low failure rates, generally below 20% for taxa with more than ten individuals claimed annually. For species with fewer than ten individuals, the failure rate is highly variable and for several species is also well below 20%. However, this group also includes all but one of the species with a non-acceptance rate of over 40%. That exception, marked 'BK' on the graph, is Black Kite, which has a failure rate of nearly 60% despite being claimed around 29 times each year. The troubled history of claims of this species was discussed in the report for 2002 (*Brit Birds* 96: 560). Black Kite was removed from the list of species considered by the committee from 1st January 2006 and it will be intriguing to observe its progress in forthcoming 'Scarce Migrants' reports.

#### Acceptance rates for counties

The mean acceptance rate for all counties making at least one claim during the five years was 75%. A number of factors influence the acceptance rate for counties, including the

number of claims and the degree of local vetting which precedes submission to the BBRC. Figures for counties which contribute very few claims reveal little and, as with the acceptance rate for species, I have set a filter. In this instance, counties were selected which achieved acceptance rates above the national average while contributing at least 1% (c. 40 claims) of the total number of claims. This identified 18 counties, which are listed in table 7, in descending order of acceptance rate (the rate for Sea Area Sole was 99% but included an overwhelming preponderance of Wilson's Storm-petrels). Comparison of tables 3 and 7 shows that counties producing a high proportion of rarities also have relatively high acceptance rates, although in purely relative terms Cornwall and Norfolk fare less well than Shetland and Scilly. Several counties enter the frame with creditable acceptance rates, with Cleveland heading the list.

#### Identification research and publications

One of the stated objectives of the BBRC is to 'develop and publish criteria for the identification of rare taxa'. I do not speak for the committee, but it is evident that its work will generate identification data on at least three fronts. Firstly, the collection, examination and adjudication of descriptions will provide a clearer focus on the field diagnosis of rare taxa generally. Secondly, establishing which species suffer from persistently low rates of acceptance will pinpoint specific inadequacies in the identification literature (frequently, insufficient emphasis on potential confusion with commoner 'pitfall' species). Thirdly, assessing claims of the rarest and least-known species will initiate research into enhanced identification criteria (such frontline research extends well beyond the confines of the BBRC but, historically, several members have made significant contributions in this area). These developments will derive in no small measure from the archive of descriptions held by the committee, which provides field notes and considered opinions from a range of observers over nearly half a century.

*Documentation of rare birds is increasingly based upon digital photographs, while taking and submitting comprehensive field notes is in decline. There has been extensive debate on the internet concerning the relative merits of written documentation and photographs in supporting claims*

**Table 7.** Acceptance rates above the national average for counties contributing at least 1% to the national total of claims.

County	Total claims	%A
Cleveland	59	96.6
Shetland	512	94.3
Scilly	201	89.1
Northeast Scotland	67	88.1
East Yorkshire	138	87.7
Dorset	127	87.4
Cambridgeshire	47	87.2
Western Isles	121	86.8
Lincolnshire	92	85.9
Kent	166	84.3
Suffolk	156	82.1
North Yorkshire	72	81.9
Orkney	121	81.8
Cornwall	211	81.5
Norfolk	364	81.3
Northumberland	107	79.4
Lancashire & North Merseyside	47	78.7
Devon	119	76.5

of rarities. Opinion is divided, but a majority, it is clear, regards photographs as providing more useful and reliable evidence. Photographs can be examined and analysed 'after the event' and unquestionably assist the adjudication of rarity records. High-quality images have more than once either clinched an identification or demonstrated that an error has been made. Photographs are also a powerful asset in identification research. It should not be implied, however, that photographs never mislead. Experience shows that digital photos not infrequently misrepresent subtle colours. With species such as the plainer Phylloscopus and Acrocephalus warblers, where precise colours (shades) may be critical to the identification process, a small series of photos cannot be relied upon for certain identification. Additionally, a central archive of written documentation generates an invaluable repository of opinion and experience on the diagnosis of rare species, and factors influencing the identification process in the field. Founded upon various examples of the species, observed in differing circumstances, and the considered experience of numbers of observers, such field notes may contribute significantly to understanding of character variation within a species. Thus, photographs complement but do not replace field notes. An aspect of morphology or behaviour, noted casually but explicitly in a field description, may hold unrealised significance. Its appearance in more than one description may well initiate a line of thought leading to a new identification character, perhaps visible in photographs but remaining undetected.

### BBRC identification texts

Individual records which elucidate identification issues, or illustrate poorly appreciated problems surrounding the assessment process, form the basis of the series of articles 'From the Rarities Committee's files'. Examples include identification of 'Balearic' Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator badius* (Brit. Birds 98: 32–42) and the complexities surrounding the report of a Herald Petrel *Pterodroma arminjoniana* off Dungeness, Kent, in January 1998 (Brit. Birds 95: 156–165). A second series of papers, 'Identification pitfalls and assessment problems', has dealt with species removed from the list of taxa adjudicated by the committee. Designed to assist both observers and county records committees (to whom the responsibility for their adjudication passes), this series covered 17 species between 1983 and 1995.

Examination of *British Birds* for the 25-year period 1970–2004 indicates that, in addition to the series mentioned above, the identification of over 100 species was discussed in papers authored or co-authored by members of the committee. During the 1970s and 1980s, these included ground-breaking papers on gulls (Peter Grant) and on stints and peeps (Peter Grant and Lars Jonsson). Future members of the committee, such as Richard Porter (raptors) and Peter Clement (wheatears), were also involved with innovative identification papers during this same period. However, a certain loss of momentum in the production of frontline identification texts is evident during more recent years. During the 1990s and early 2000s, some new topics have been addressed, for example brown flycatchers in the genus *Muscicapa* (Bradshaw *et al.* 1991), but a majority of identification texts have involved reviewing rather than extending existing knowledge. Certainly, current identification problems are increasingly esoteric. Their solution may require international co-operation as well as considerable investment of time, in the field and in the museum, at home and abroad. Nevertheless, it would be encouraging to see an increased flow of frontline identification texts with BBRC involvement.

### Records committees internationally

The concept of the national or state rarities committee appears to have originated in The Netherlands in 1958 and in Britain in 1959, and became worldwide during the following decades. Examples, by decade, of countries or states which have since formed such committees include Denmark and Malta during the 1960s; Austria, California, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Poland and Switzerland during the 1970s; Australia, France, Hungary and Morocco during the 1980s; and Belarus, Italy and Portugal during the 1990s. In 1993 the formation of the AERC established a European framework for committee procedures and a pointer to the accredited committee in each constituent country. As at September 2006, the AERC website (<http://www.aerc.eu/>) listed 33 member countries.

Many committees acknowledge that the BBRC provided a template for their own constitution and procedures, while the AERC 'Guidelines' now provide an internationally agreed protocol. Even so, committees adapt to local



conditions and it is instructive to compare the experience and working practices of the BBRC with those of committees overseas. The following paragraphs summarise the information, gleaned via a questionnaire, from representatives of the AERC records committees, the Birds Australia Rarities Committee and the California Bird Records Committee.

### *Committee composition and constitution*

Committees variously comprise between four and ten voting members. Of the responding committees, only those of Austria, Belarus, California and The Netherlands include, or have included, a female member. In 85% of committees, new members are nominated by the existing members. More democratic routes are very much in a minority, though in some countries, where the number of birders is relatively small, recruitment by public nomination would be impracticable. More understandably, Chairmen are usually selected by a vote among the committee membership. Strangely, even with the opportunity for successive terms, there is no fixed term of office for the Chairmen of the majority of committees. Exceptions include Hungary (five years) and Morocco (three years), while Switzerland does not have a Chairman and conducts proceedings entirely via its Secretary. Annual reports are almost invariably published in a national (or state) ornithological journal, most of which are non-profit orientated. In Morocco, an annual report is published on the internet, supplemented by a printed tri-annual report in the bulletin of the African Bird Club. Committees frequently originate from within a national or regional ornithological organisation, which provides some level of funding. However, committee members not infrequently bear part or all of the costs incurred.

### *Procedures*

Nearly all committees are geared to receive records via e-mail (many appear to have been ahead of the BBRC in this respect). The Danish committee is currently introducing a web-based system for directly uploading submissions to its database (other committees may perhaps employ this technique but have not explicitly mentioned it). Circulation of records around voting members is more evenly balanced between electronic and paper-based methods. Austria processes its records via a password-

protected website. Most, but not all, committees now accept photographs as the principal supporting evidence, recognising that many records would otherwise be lost. In this respect, extremes range from an absolute requirement for written documentation, to committees extracting photographs directly from the internet, with no directly submitted input.

In a minority of countries, for example Australia, Finland and The Netherlands, a letter explaining the reasons for rejection is always supplied. More typically, however, reasons for non-acceptance of claims are not disclosed but will be discussed with observers on request. Similarly, committee members' comments upon records are not available for public inspection in the vast majority of cases (usually upon legal advice). Exceptions include California, where an archive of comments is available for public examination.

Most committees acknowledge that the issue of 'single observer records' can be taxing. This issue was examined in detail by Shaw (2005). Nearly always, the explicit policy of committees is that 'all records are judged on their merits'. However, this commonly embraces an understanding that, with 'single observer records', knowledge of the observer assumes greater significance. The representative of one overseas committee considered it very unlikely that, in practice, a claim of a major rarity would be accepted from a single observer.

### *The impact of technological change*

As with the BBRC, nearly all committees have detected changes deriving from the reporting of rare birds on the internet, the exceptions being in areas where access to the web is not yet widespread (e.g. Belarus). Interestingly, opinion is much divided on whether or not the internet has led to a decline in enthusiasm for submitting records to the national records committee. In countries with long-established and large numbers of birdwatchers, the internet has *tended* to reduce enthusiasm for submitting records. In countries where interest in birds has more recently begun to expand, the appearance of rarity photographs on the web is perceived as one of the driving factors, and has also focused attention on the national records committee. Support for the national committee is seen as decreasing or increasing along similar dividing lines. However, increasing *local* support does not necessarily go hand-in-hand with a high

proportion of records being submitted. In countries such as Morocco, many rare birds are seen only by visiting birders, who do not always submit them to the national records committee. The committee sometimes finds photographs on the web relating to occurrences which were quite unknown to them. Thus, there is still an educational task within the *home* countries in Europe from where the majority of visiting birders originate.

The number of claims supported primarily by photographs is increasing almost universally and, in general, the use of photography is perceived as assisting in the acquisition and adjudication of records. On an allied note, although still a minority technique, sound recording is also adding to the technological lexicon and can be crucial with species such as Iberian Chiffchaff *Ph. ibericus*. The increasing use of photography has corresponded with a decrease in taking and submitting field notes.

Perhaps the most interesting, if contentious, response to these changes in technology and observer behaviour has come from the Irish Rare Birds Committee (IRBC). Changes to its procedures for collating and validating records are described in detail on its website ([http://www.birdwatchireland.ie/bwii/irbc\\_announcements.html](http://www.birdwatchireland.ie/bwii/irbc_announcements.html)), from which the following is an extract:

'Publication of photographs on the internet on such a large scale has had the indirect and very positive effect of shifting the assessment of a majority of rarity records into a broader, more public domain. Usually, the identification of a rarity is confirmed on the basis of just one or two photographs. Controversial or tentative claims are usually discussed openly by observers through e-mail groups such as the Irish BirdNet (IBN). In practically all cases where photographs are published, a broad consensus is reached without the record ever having been submitted to a rarities committee.'

The IRBC has recognised this development and radically reviewed its procedures. Documentation is still required for claims of the rarest species but photographs published on the internet, provided they support the claim, are considered adequate corroboration. Direct submission of more comprehensive details is still welcomed, especially when there are no photographs, and records are then assessed in the usual way. Claims of the more regularly occurring rarities no longer require formal documen-

tation but, as many are photographed and/or multi-observed, the veracity (or otherwise) of most claims can be determined readily. At the end of each month, records of all rarities are posted on the IRBC website in a 'Provisional List of Rare Bird Sightings'. Birders are invited to inform the committee of any errors they notice in this list. This has the dual benefit of eliminating basic errors of fact while exposing the list to public examination and comment. The committee seeks formal documentation of the less rare species only where anomalies or public disquiet over particular records become evident (Paul Milne and Killian Mullarney *in litt.*).

The IRBC reports that this innovative approach serves it well. Whether such methods could be translated to Britain, where the total number of rarity records is significantly larger, is open to debate.

#### Research based upon AERC data

Understanding of migration, population fluctuations, and range extension are frequently cited as potential 'scientific benefits' of rarity recording. The temporal and geographical distributions of rare birds at a national level have been mapped in a number of publications (notably Sharrock (1976) and Dymond *et al.* (1989) in Britain, and van den Berg & Bosman (1999) in The Netherlands), while potential causes of vagrancy have been discussed by, among others, Rabøl (1969), Vinicombe & Cottridge (1996), Gilroy & Lees (2003), and Thorup (2004). However, in relation to the vast, international database of records of rare birds, fundamental and correlative research into its implications appears limited.

Respondents from the AERC and other records committees were asked if they could provide examples of the data in their files being used to further scientific understanding of some of these issues. The few responses included clarification of the true status of certain seabirds in the southwestern approaches of Britain and Ireland, and increased extralimital records of species such as Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* and Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* allied to expansion in breeding range. Comprehensive studies, correlating patterns of vagrancy with migration strategies or distributional changes, appear to be few. One more-rigorous example was that of Thorup (2004), who used multiple regression analysis to examine the

validity of reverse migration as a cause of vagrancy. The data on vagrants were extracted from published compilations of records from Ireland, Britain, France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland. Among other conclusions, this study demonstrated that species which normally migrate eastward in autumn from their breeding grounds are more likely to consistently reverse migrate than those species migrating southward. Discussing possible mechanisms for the observed patterns of reverse orientation, Thorup concluded that the high number of reversed migrants in some species was unlikely to result from random movements and more likely to result from 'over-representation of specific directions other than the standard direction' (i.e. selectively directed movements).

Taken collectively, the AERC committees' files surely hold a wealth of information as yet untapped.

### Public perceptions and opinions

The following paragraphs explore public opinion on the adjudication and publication of records of rare birds. Commentary is based upon responses to questionnaires, which were sent to a small selection of experienced observers in Britain, Ireland, mainland Europe and North America (see Acknowledgments). The synopsis does not purport to be a census of global views and convictions. It is based upon a selective sample of informed opinion but, thereby, its contents are substantiated rather than apocryphal. In order to solicit various shades of opinion, recipients included several past members of the BBRC, at least one key figure from each of the newer avenues for rare-bird 'news and comment', and several individuals known to hold views opposed to the current status quo. The number of responses from the last two groups was low – but the opportunity to comment was provided. All the issues have been examined earlier in this article and this concluding section is designed to present, and not interrogate, prevailing

views. To ensure objectivity, the text is constructed around quotations from respondents (British except where otherwise stated). Context is provided but, otherwise, respondents' views are presented without judgement.

### On support for the rarities committee

All respondents believed that a national forum for reviewing reports of rare birds was important or essential. In Britain, the view that the BBRC provided a valuable service to ornithology was widely supported, though two respondents implied that it was the *service* which was valuable and that it did not *necessarily* have to reside with the BBRC. Reasons for supporting the BBRC included the consistency, reliability, independence, continuity and international recognition which stemmed from the committee structure (as opposed to individual or narrowly based pronouncements).

'There has to be an official body to judge and record rare sightings. This must be a reasonable-sized committee, not just one person (or a small group of people), so judgements will be balanced, and also because there will be a larger pool of knowledge and experience. Because there is rotation on the BBRC, it will not disappear because members lose interest or become too old.' Brett Richards (on the value of the committee model)

Support for the committee will depend on



Iain Leach

75. First-winter Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*, Marsden, Co. Durham, October 1999. Like Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* (plate 73), Isabelline Shrike is a rarity for which all claims in recent years have been accepted. However, the identification of subspecies is a much more thorny issue, and while some adults and a few first-winters are readily diagnosable, others remain much more difficult.



public confidence in its members. Not everyone has a clear image of the committee members and the skills which they bring to the BBRC. Tim Cleeves suggests that this could be improved if profiles of members were published periodically. This could be achieved most effectively and accessibly via a range of popular magazines, in addition to *British Birds*, and via the committee's website.

The role of the committee was near universally supported but several weaknesses were identified in its enactment. Perceived shortcomings included:

- the speed with which records were processed and decisions relayed to recorders and observers;
- allied to the above, the appearance of the Rarities Report was late in the following year, when details and images of rarities had appeared elsewhere months earlier;
- a lack of regular progress reports, both on

current records and on reviews of past records;

- the requirement for documentation of multi-observed rarities for which many photographs had already appeared on the internet;
  - an inconsistent record in explaining decisions which were known to be controversial (both rejections and acceptances);
- Solutions proposed for the above included:
- systems for uploading photographs and fast-tracking such records, where they were known to be well established;
  - publishing a regular progress report every spring;
  - notifying recorders and/or observers (and listing on the BBRC website) of all records which go to recirculation.

'If BBRC had an electronically submitted fast-track photo system for some of the less rare species, it could be an acceptable alternative to detailed descriptions. The BBRC might be able to restrict itself to birds with, say, fewer than 20 or 50 British records.' Tim Melling (on streamlining BBRC procedures)

### On the Rarities Report

The 'BBRC Report' is still regarded by a majority as the definitive statement on the occurrence of rare birds in Great Britain. Its contents are regarded as well presented, though Ian Lewington and Ian Wallace both regretted a decline in 'interpretative comment' in recent years.

'The Rarities Report will never be 'news' again but it could and should 'inform' us more than it does.' Ian Wallace (on the BBRC annual report)

In view of the inconsistent usage and definition of recording areas in various publications (see 'Statistical preamble', p. 158), John Marchant suggested that the location of records in the BBRC reports could be more objectively conveyed:

'We should somehow establish a set of non-overlapping recording boundaries for the UK. Also, I would like to see the BBRC



Michal Ciach

**76.** Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*, Tatra National Park, southern Poland, November 2006. Surprisingly, considering that it is such a distinctive bird, Nutcracker has a long history of rejected records (table 6), which can be attributed to the fact that many are claimed by less-experienced observers.

report make more use of grid references for plotting records, rather than an idiosyncratic choice of counties.' John Marchant (on the need for improved definition of recording areas)

Most respondents ensure that their own records reach the committee, either by direct submission or via the relevant county recorder. The general perception is that a declining percentage of observers nationally are submitting records but that this is offset to some extent by acquisition of reports from third parties. Estimates of the percentage of records failing to reach the committee varied from an optimistic 5% to a pessimistic 22%.

The accumulating record of rare species in the reports can point to interesting changes in species' distribution and perhaps in the environment:

'Several former Siberian vagrants are clearly in the process of setting up regular wintering areas in the Western Palearctic. I'm sure that this must be largely a consequence of global warming, perhaps coupled with man-made environmental changes. I think it's valuable that these increases have been so carefully monitored in this country. It shows how rapidly changes to birds' distributions and migration patterns can take place. The changes even in our lifetime have been quite amazing.' Keith Vinicombe (on the benefits of an accurate archive of rarity records)

Few respondents themselves make constructive use of the data in the reports. However:

'I suspect that everyone who gives historical data on British rarities in a published paper, such as the total number recorded, citing bumper years or occurrence trends, uses this source.' Peter Lansdown (on the use of data from the BBRC reports)

In this respect, the increasingly restricted range of species adjudicated by the committee is perceived by several county recorders as regrettable, making the BBRC report a far less useful resource for editors of local reports. Andy Davis and Steve Dudley also noted that, away from the most productive counties, few observers would now have occasion to send in a record to the BBRC and this would distance them from the committee.

Specific comment on the relative strengths and weaknesses of the BBRC report compared with the rarity reports of other countries came from five respondents. Three noted with approval that the Dutch report included brief

reasons for non-acceptance but also recognised the potential problems in doing so. Some differences in content and appeal were attributed to the different taxonomic perspectives of the Dutch and the British but it was recognised that, in Britain, this is determined by BOURC decisions.

Among those keeping 'lists', most respondents respect and abide by the decisions of the BBRC (and the BOURC). However, not everyone has confidence in the BBRC's decisions:

'The decisions made by the BBRC do not have any bearing on my British List. I believe a fully detailed reason should be given for either acceptance or rejection.' Lee Evans (on BBRC decisions on significant records)

Several people distinguished between what they termed the 'official' listings and their 'personal' lists, but not always in the anticipated manner.

'I would not accept a record on my list of a bird rejected by the BBRC. However, the BBRC has accepted a bird I have seen (and submitted notes on) which I have personally rejected!' Richard Porter (on adherence to BBRC decisions)

A different slant on 'BBRC decisions' involved the provenance of some of the entries appearing in the list of accepted records. Tim Melling and Stephen White stressed that the value of the report would be enhanced by more explicit treatment of escapee likelihood.

'In the past, the BBRC used their contacts, knowledge and experience to minimise the number of likely escapees entering the permanent record. In recent years, Appendix 3 notwithstanding, species of questionable provenance have quite frequently appeared in the main list of accepted records. The committee has commented only upon matters of identification. This leaves a serious vacuum for birders concerned with their British List and encourages them to follow less-informed sources.' Tim Melling (on the assessment of escapee likelihood)

### *On BBRC standards*

Discussion of 'BBRC standards' focused less on whether the committee demands too high a standard of written documentation (the traditional debate), and more upon whether written documentation should be required at all. Nevertheless, criteria for acceptability and the



issue of 'single observer' records were among the issues raised.

Some advocate that certainty is paramount:

'I would strongly argue that it is always better to lose a few good records than publish some which are suspect.' Richard Fairbank (on standards of adjudication)

Others support a more pragmatic approach:

'The committee ought to decide whether a record is believable and probable, not whether it is immaculately documented. The members of the committee should be asked, for each record, just one question: "Do you believe that it was what is claimed?" A "Yes" = Accept; a "No" = Reject. There used to be, and probably still are, too many records which 7/10 members accept and 3/10 reject which, quite clearly, were what was claimed.' Tim Sharrock (on standards of adjudication)

Of course, rejection does not necessarily imply that an error was made:

'A rejected record does not always mean the bird was not what it was claimed to be – it is often the case that the documentation simply wasn't good enough.' John Oates (on reasons for record rejection)

Several individual observers (and all AERC committee representatives) recognised the exceptional circumstances attendant upon 'single observer records'. With first records for state, county or country, witnessed by only a single observer, a photograph is widely regarded as beneficial, or essential, to acceptance. On behalf of observers covering remote and little-watched locations, a different perspective was offered:

'There is too much reliance on images. An image is one piece of evidence, which can be misleading or open to fraud. I strongly believe that well-documented, non-photographed single-observer firsts can be acceptable from very good observers with proven track records. In locations such as St Kilda, North Rona and Foula, where seasoned rarity finders frequently operate alone, back-up (photographic or otherwise) is not always possible.' Ken Shaw (on the acceptability of written descriptions)

The committee acknowledges that observer profile and 'level of claims' are factors in record assessment, yet its database may not be best designed to facilitate their accurate analysis:

'I gather that the official rarity database con-

tinues to hold no observer details. Thus, there can be no impartial, submission-driven analysis of individual observer behaviour available to the BBRC. Hunting effort and area, vector selection, seasonal preferences, even exceptional "luck" (properly the product of skill, craft, niche knowledge and long hours in the field) – and hence "strike rate" – might well be measurable.' Ian Wallace (on the 'observer factor' in record assessment)

### *On technological change and rarity recording*

The topic which provoked most comment was that of technological change and its influence upon the recording and adjudication of rare birds. The two key issues were:

- the emergence of digital cameras (and to a lesser extent sound equipment) and its transformation of the recording of rare birds;
- the internet as a medium for the rapid dissemination of news, opinion and images.

Most accounts of rarity records now centre on impressive photographs and, for many, it is these which command attention:

'When reading an account of a rare bird, it seems almost superfluous reading a detailed description when stunning photographs of the bird accompany the article.' Tim Melling (on the impact of photographs)

Published photographs also create a 'public record' of a rarity, even if it is not immediately (or ever) submitted to the committee:

'Even if a record is not officially submitted by the finder, the presence of photographs on the internet or in popular magazines means that a record can still be assessed and is not lost with time, as previously happened with note-taking, i.e. if notes weren't submitted, the record was lost.' Paul Baxter (on the lasting value of published photographs)

Photographs, used judiciously, can provide data difficult or impossible to convey in words and can confirm or refute debated identifications:

'I am one of those who maintain that a series of good photographs is better than a written description (better, but not making it superfluous!). It is important, however, to have a series of photographs to avoid various traps related to photographic evidence. Even with perhaps five good pictures at hand, all pointing in one direction, a sixth photograph can on rare occasions turn this around and reveal the bird's true identity.' Lars Svensson, Sweden (on the



value of photographs – with provisos)

However, documentation based almost entirely upon photographs deprives the archive of a wealth of other valuable data:

'With records based primarily or entirely on photographs, much useful information falls by the wayside. Formal reports that thoroughly describe the circumstances of the sighting, the elimination of similar species, the lighting, the weather – not to mention a description of the bird from head to tail – have drastically decreased.' Phil Davis, Maryland, USA (on the loss of information with 'photo only' documentation)

While benefiting analysis *after* the event, pre-occupation with photography can impair the actual observation of a bird:

'As an artist, I felt that drawing was the only way to experience a bird. I had to look at individual feathers and shape to convey them accurately in my art. Subconsciously, you create more of a blueprint in your memory for "jizz". I am now also a die-hard photographer and it's certainly a different focus. The emphasis is on the technical concerns of capturing the bird – exposure, composition, etc. You're not really "looking" at the bird itself at the time of observation, and thus you don't get the same attention to detail as when studying, or drawing it in life.' Julian Hough, Connecticut, USA (on drawings

versus photographs)

The internet has changed approaches to news dissemination, the discussion of current records and computer-based research. Images on the web facilitate discussion of current issues and also provide a resource for continuing research of plumage and structural characters.

'In the past, it was much harder to separate what was really there and what the observers thought to be there. The analysis is no longer the work of the actual observers alone, but is also done by interested non-observers on the internet.' Arnoud van den Berg, The Netherlands (on the value of photographs on the internet)

'Access to an internet library of good digital photos, which is expanding at a phenomenal rate, provides a fantastic opportunity for students of plumage characters to carry out a detailed study of a lot of individual birds and, I suspect, is driving many of the advances in our understanding of large gull identification.' Andy Webb (on the value of photographs on the internet)

While photographs are universally recognised as benefiting record adjudication, and providing a valuable research tool, the dissemination of news and commentary now lacks the discipline of earlier, more considered (if less timely) media:



Gary Thoburn

77. Adult 'Black Brant' *Branta bernicla nigricans*, with dark-bellied Brent Geese *B. b. bernicla*, Ferrybridge, Dorset, November 2006. This distinctive American and east Siberian race of Brent Goose was removed from the BBRC list on 1st July 2005, so individuals like this will now be assessed by county and regional rarities committees. This form had presented more problems for the compilers and editors of the BBRC annual report than any other since the late 1990s; not so much in terms of identification (although that in itself can be tricky – see for example *Brit. Birds* 98: 632–633), but particularly in terms of deciding which birds were new arrivals or returning birds, most especially when dealing with those individuals wintering in the vicinity of county boundaries! The argument that this is a bird best dealt with at a local level is compelling, at least in terms of the rarity statistics.

'My experience of the internet is that it tends to fragment the delivery of information, and consequently make it more difficult to ensure that members of the public receive the "best information" rather than "any information".' Andy Webb (on the pros and cons of the internet)

### On ways to improve BBRC procedures

Now that observers are encouraged by the BBRC to submit claims via e-mail, one county recorder urged that this could and should be reciprocated.

'As soon as they are made, decisions should be communicated by e-mail to those who submitted them rather than expecting observers/county recorders to continually check the website for the latest decisions.' Steve White (on 'reciprocal' use of e-mail)

A repeated request was that the committee should further adapt its procedures to 'fast-track' well-established and well-photographed records. Other suggestions were surprisingly few but included three advocating the value of third-party input.

'Any jury is only human and mistakes will be made. However, decisions are not irreversible and, in these days of superb photography and the web, it is easier for almost all observers to evaluate records and come to their own decisions. Competent observers can provide informed opinion and help to ensure that errors are minimised and that those that do occur are corrected.' Bryan Bland (on reviewing committee decisions)

Very occasionally, the importance of a record transcends national boundaries, as in the case of the Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* reported from Druridge Bay, Northumberland, in May 1998 (*Brit. Birds* 95: 279–299). If controversy or public disquiet surrounds the adjudication of a high-profile record, then one contributor suggests that third-party assessment may provide a resolution:

'The BBRC should seriously consider farming out any particularly controversial or internationally important records to a foreign committee for independent assessment.' Richard Fairbank (on assessment of controversial or significant records)

A case for devolved responsibility at the heart of record assessment, as implemented in Ireland (see 'Records committees internationally', pp. 164–167), was proposed by a long-

established member of the IRBC:

'It is my personal belief that now is the right time to develop a way of spreading to the wider birding community the responsibility for what does and does not qualify for the "official record". Inevitably, it seems, the traditional approach of rarities committees around the world results in a proportionately high level of what might be described as 'non-co-operation', usually due to a feeling that the committee is either biased against (and perhaps also in favour of) some observers, or is too conservative/strict, or is insufficiently qualified. This results in two "sides" which tend to work against one another instead of towards a common objective.' Killian Mullarney, Ireland (on the case for devolved record assessment)

### Conclusions

The creation of the BBRC in 1959 established a protocol for the collection and adjudication of reports of rare taxa which has since been emulated worldwide. Its activities have established a consistent and disciplined system of validation and, concurrently, provided an invaluable archive of records of species vagrant to Britain.

A comprehensive national report provides an historical record of individual occurrences of rare taxa. Over time, its cumulative contents reveal instructive statistics, such as the distribution of rare taxa nationally, specific and geographical variations in rates of acceptance and non-acceptance, and their implications in terms of species diagnosis and record assessment.

A small sample indicates that public opinion remains encouragingly supportive of the BBRC. Nevertheless, changes in observer behaviour and recording techniques have challenged, and will continue to challenge, committee procedures. The influence of the internet and digital photography on the recording and reporting of rare birds has been profound. The rapid appearance of digital images on internet sites and in topical magazines has led some to question the necessity for the more formal documentation which has traditionally been required by records committees. The indications are that the BBRC remains alert to such developments and is ready to streamline its procedures accordingly yet appropriately.

Care must be taken to ensure that the value of the BBRC database is not compromised. Examined collectively, well-presented and fully documented records provide an unrivalled resource for research into the temporal and



geographical distribution of rare taxa and the factors which influence their arrival and detection. Observers should be mindful that the value of a comprehensive archive extends beyond identification issues.

There is an increasingly international perspective for records committees and huge potential for AERC-driven initiatives in the co-operative analysis of data. The BBRC remains uniquely qualified to monitor and validate records of rare taxa reaching Britain and to contribute to international understanding of their migration strategies and the causes of vagrancy.

#### Acknowledgments

This review has depended upon the labours of a very large number of individuals over a period of nearly half a century. The principal debt of gratitude is to those who have submitted their observations diligently to county recorders and to the BBRC. Without their interest there would be no national archive of rarity records. Next in rank is the often thankless task of past and present members of the BBRC, in adjudicating records and producing a disciplined account in an annual report. I trust that members of the committee will perceive from this review that their efforts are widely appreciated, even if occasional comments do not always accord with committee opinions.

The following people have provided advice, comments or answers to my questionnaires, and their input has been invaluable: Paul Baxter, Bryan Bland, Colin Bradshaw, Alan Brown, Mike Carter, Tim Cleaves, Andrea Corso, Andy Davis, Phil Davis, Steve Dudley, Gonalo Elias, Dave Emley, Lee Evans, Richard Fairbank, Dave Flumm, Jacques Franchimont, Peter Fraser, Mervyn Griffin, Nic Hallam, Chris Harbard, Julian Hough, Rob Hume, Maris Jaunzemis, Chris Kehoe, Guy Kirwan, Sebastian Klein, Johannes Laber, Peter Lansdown, Paul Lehman, Ian Lewington, Antero Lindholm, John Marchant, Tony Marr, Guy McCaskie, Tim Melling, Paul Milne, John Montalto, Alan Morton, Killian Mullarney, Andreas Noeske, John Oates, Uku Paal, Tony Palliser, Richard Porter, Brian Rabbitts, Visa Rauste, Brett Richards, Don Roberson, Tim Sharrock, Ken Shaw, Tadeusz Stawarczyk, Paul St Pierre, Lars Svensson, Zalai Tamás, Kasper Thorup, Armond van den Berg, Roland van der Vliet, Marnix Vandegehuchte, Keith Vinicombe, Alexandre Vintchevski, Bernard Volet, Ian Wallace, Andy Webb, Steve White.

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# Appendix I. The British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC), 1959–2006

Chairmen		Hon. Secretaries	
P. A. D. Hollom	1959–72	G. A. Pyman	1959–61
D. I. M. Wallace	1972–76 (non-voting 1976)	C. M. Swaine	1961–63
P. J. Grant	1976–86	D. D. Harber	1963–66
P. G. Lansdown	1986–93 (non-voting 1990–93)	F. R. Smith	1966–75
R. A. Hume	1993–97	J. N. Dymond	1975–77
C. Bradshaw	1997 to date (non-voting)	J. O'Sullivan	1977–78 (first non-voting Secretary)
		M. J. Rogers	1978–2006
Voting Members			
H. G. Alexander	1959–63	S. C. Madge	1977–88
D. G. Bell	1962–76	J. H. Marchant	1986–93
A. R. M. Blake	1963–76	J. P. Martin	1997 to date
Chris Bradshaw	2006 to date	J. R. Mather	1976–84
Colin Bradshaw	1990–97	J. McLoughlin	1996–2006
P. Bristow	2003 to date	H. P. Medhurst	1959
D. J. Britton	1980–90	M. F. M. Meiklejohn	1959–69
A. Brown	1987–95	I. C. T. Nisbet	1959–63
G. P. Catley	1990–95	D. Page	1995–2005
P. Clement	1990–97	R. F. Porter	1981–84
P. E. Davis	1963–75	G. A. Pyman	1959–70
A. R. Dean	1984–92	R. J. Raines	1975–81
L. J. Degnan	2004 to date	R. A. Richardson	1969–76
R. H. Dennis	1967–87	I. S. Robertson	1984–90
J. N. Dymond	1975–77	J. A. Rowlands	1999 to date
P. M. Ellis	1991–99	R. F. Ruttledge	1959–60 (Irish records only)
I. J. Ferguson–Lees	1959–63	J. T. R. Sharrock	1969–83
S. J. M. Gantlett	1987–94	K. D. Shaw	1994–2002
M. Garner	2006 to date	B. J. Small	2001 to date
P. J. Grant	1969–86	F. R. Smith	1966–75
D. D. Harber	1959–66	K. D. Smith	1960–61
P. V. Harvey	1997 to date	J. G. Steele	1997–2006
A. Hazelwood	1959–61	A. M. Stoddart	1993–2001
C. D. R. Heard	1989–96	C. M. Swaine	1961–63
P. A. D. Hollom	1959–72	J. J. Sweeney	2002 to date
D. J. Holman	1976–85	R. I. Thorpe	1995–2004
R. A. Hume	1988–97	K. E. Vinicombe	1982–91
T. P. Inskip	1979–89	R. Wagstaffe	1962–70
R. J. Johns	1972–79	G. Walbridge	1992–2003
P. G. Lansdown	1983–90	D. I. M. Wallace	1963–68, 1971–75
J. A. Lidster	2005 to date	G. A. Williams	1975–80
B. Little	1976–82	K. Williamson	1959–63
RIACT		Statisticians	
Various committee members plus Museum		D. J. Britton	1977–82 (unofficial statistician)
Consultant and other referees.		Various members then ad hoc until ...	
C. Kehoe (Hon. Secretary) 2004 to date		P. A. Fraser	1990 to date (first 'official' statistician)
		J. Ryan assisted PAF for several years	
Museum Consultants		Archivists	
A. Hazelwood	1959–61	P. R. Colston	1985–96 (archives held at British Museum)
R. Wagstaffe	1962–69	J. H. Marchant	1996 to date (archives held at BTO)
D. Goodwin	1969–80		
P. R. Colston	1985–2000 (unofficially prior to 1985)		
I. Lewington	2000–03		
B. J. Small	2003 to date		

Seabirds Advisory Panel (1987–1996)

P. R. Colston	1987–95
W. F. Curtis	1987–96
J. Enticott	1987–96
P. Harrison	1987–89
B. A. E. Marr	1987–96
S. C. Madge	1989–96
J. Ryan	1995–96

Avicultural consultants

M. D. England	1970 (in practice from c. 1967)–1980
T. P. Inskip	1976–1989
M. A. Ogilvie (wildfowl) ad hoc	

## Appendix 2. BBRC methodology

Feature or procedure	Methodology	Annotations
Function	Application of uniform adjudication standards to claimed rare birds in England, Scotland and Wales.	(a) Compass includes 'at sea' records within the 200-nautical-mile (370-km) European Exclusion Zone or midpoint between the UK and any neighbouring country. (b) Assesses Isle of Man and Channel Islands records at request of local ornithologists (but numbers not included in species totals).
Personnel	Ten voting members plus Chairman (more recently in non-voting capacity), non-voting Secretary, non-voting Museum Consultant/Archivist, non-voting Statistician and a range of identification and avicultural consultants.	One vacancy among voting members arises each year as the result of voluntary resignation or the retirement of longest-serving member. When more than one candidate is nominated, a vote ensues among county and regional recorders (five votes each) and bird observatories (two votes each).
Submission of records	Directly from observers or (preferably) via county and regional recorders.	Electronic submission (e-mail) now strongly encouraged, with intention of achieving 'paperless' system.
Circulation of records	Standard batches of c. 12 records circulated to all members, in changing order, so that documentation accumulates comments of those earlier in circulation.	(a) Simple records, those either photographed or multi-observed and those of the commoner species, are considered by a group of five members of the committee. If there is any disagreement in this process, the record goes to a full circulation. (b) Electronic circulation (e-mail) now the norm.
Processing of records	Votes may be 'accept', 'reject' or 'pend', the last if some further clarification is required. If one or more members reject, record is recirculated, so that all comments are seen by each member. If voting remains 9:1, reject vote is overruled. If voting is 8:2 or less favourable, record is rejected.	(a) When particular issues are raised during initial circulation, details may be sent to independent expert referees, and their comments added to the file. (b) Following significant advances in identification criteria for a species, or if new evidence comes to light regarding a particular record, earlier records may be reviewed. For reversal of a previously accepted record, at least six 'reject' votes are required.

Species new to Britain	Records of species or subspecies new to Britain are assessed in the usual way, but are then sent to the Records Committee of the British Ornithologists' Union.	Acceptance by the BOURC has to be unanimous and publication of such records is subject to acceptance by both committees. If the BOURC accepts the identification, it then decides whether the species should be added to the British List and, if so, in which category.
Archives	All records, documentation and deliberations are kept in the committee's archives, currently at the BTO.	More recently in electronic form and complete computerisation in progress.
Publications	'Report on rare birds in Great Britain' published annually in British Birds, usually in the Oct, Nov or Dec issue. News and developments announced in 'Rarities Committee News' and 'Announcements', published as appropriate.	(a) Full details of species new to Britain and Ireland are published in British Birds (and increasingly elsewhere), usually and preferably authored by the original observer(s). (b) Data in files contribute to advances in identification criteria, and towards identification papers, published both by members of the BBRC and by others.

## Rarities Committee news

### BBRC welcomes two new members

In March, Paul Harvey and John Martin will retire from BBRC. They will be difficult to replace after a decade of very hard and often difficult work.

This year, we were in the privileged position of having no fewer than five outstanding candidates for the two vacant positions, and the result was predictably tight. The election process, ably organised by NewsAcre, was itself a success, with 49 counties, bird observatories and recording areas casting the highest number of votes ever in a BBRC election.

The two successful candidates are Chris Batty and Mike Pennington. There are many

similarities between the two. Both are ringers, great rarity finders and top birders in every way. Chris will bring a range of important skills and a wealth of knowledge to the committee. He is a local recorder, county report editor and local records committee member for Lancashire but also has an interest in, and has written extensively on, current areas of taxonomic debate. Despite living in one of the most remote corners of Britain, on the island of Unst (the northernmost of the Shetland Islands), Mike Pennington's name will be familiar to many. His list of rarity finds is sickeningly impressive, even

given where he has lived for the past 20 years. He has also edited the *Shetland Bird Report* since 1998, and has several high-quality identification publications to his credit. Chris and Mike are both welcomed to the committee.

We would like to thank the three other candidates, Paul Baxter, Mark Chapman and Paul French, all outstanding and worthy nominees in their own right, and BBRC can count itself lucky to have had such a strong card.



The British Birds Rarities Committee is sponsored by Carl Zeiss Ltd.



# Conservation research news

Compiled by Andy Evans and Len Campbell



## Trichomoniasis – a significant threat to British birds?

In the last couple of years, disease as a mortality agent in wild birds has been brought sharply into the public eye by the spread of H5N1 avian influenza. However, many different diseases affect wild birds and there are comparatively few studies of their importance, especially in terms of conservation. A parasitic, single-celled flagellate organism called *Trichomonas gallinae* can cause avian trichomoniasis, a disease affecting the upper digestive tract (throat and crop). The parasite can cause severe lesions in the crop and affected birds show general lethargy and fluffed-up plumage, difficulty in eating and breathing, drooling or regurgitation of food, and sometimes signs of thirst. Some birds can carry the parasite without showing clinical symptoms. A recent paper (Villanúa *et al.* 2006) reported infestation rates among Wood Pigeons *Columba palumbus* shot in two areas of Spain. About one in three birds were carrying the parasite, but prevalence in adults was much higher than in juveniles, 73% of adults being infected compared with 20% of juveniles in the south of the country. Juvenile infection rate varied between 20% in the south and 35% in the north. The authors suggested that the significantly lower prevalence in birds sampled from the north may be due to birds congregating at feeder sites for gamebirds (which also carry the parasite) in the south. Only 2.2% of infected birds showed clinical signs of disease (lesions visible to the naked eye on post-mortem). Nevertheless, the body condition of infected birds was significantly lower than that of uninfected individuals, suggesting that the fitness of infected birds was lowered, whether or not they showed clinical signs of the disease. The findings are of conservation importance, given that the disease is a major

cause of nestling mortality in the endangered Spanish Imperial Eagle *Aquila adalbertii* and Bonelli's Eagle *A. fasciata*, the adult eagles bringing their young into contact with the disease by preying on infected birds. The authors cite an earlier suggestion that the parasite, which was introduced to North America with domestic pigeons *C. livia*, could have been a factor in the extinction of the Passenger Pigeon *Ectopistes migratorius*.

The paper also has relevance for the UK, where trichomoniasis has been well documented in gamebirds, Wood Pigeons and Collared Doves *Streptopelia decaocto*. In 2006, the Garden Bird Health initiative<sup>1</sup> recorded large outbreaks in Greenfinches *Carduelis chloris* and Common Chaffinches *Fringilla coelebs* (after its apparent initial emergence in 2005) and detected it for the first time in the red-listed House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* (Lawson *et al.* 2006). It is unclear how the disease spread to these species, but the recent increase in the occurrence of both Collared Dove and Wood Pigeon in gardens, as documented by surveys carried out by the BTO and the RSPB, is surely significant.

Lawson, B., Cunningham, A., Chantry, J., Hughes, L., Kirkwood, J., Pennycott, T., & Simpson, V. 2006. Epidemic finch mortality. *Veterinary Record* 159: 367.  
Villanúa, D., Höfle, U., Pérez-Rodríguez, L. & Gortázar, C. 2006. *Trichomonas gallinae* in wintering Common Wood Pigeons in Spain. *Ibis* 148: 641–648.

<sup>1</sup> A collaborative study, run by the Institute of Zoology, to determine the extent and correlative factors of diseases in garden birds:

[http://www.zoo.cam.ac.uk/ioz/projects/garden\\_bird\\_health\\_initiative.htm](http://www.zoo.cam.ac.uk/ioz/projects/garden_bird_health_initiative.htm)

<http://www.ufaw.org.uk/gbhi.php>

## Successfully predicting the impacts of development on bird mortality

Underlying much of the applied research work currently being carried out on British birds is the need to be able to predict, as accurately as possible, what will happen to a particular species or population if there are changes to the environment where it lives. Nowhere is this more acute than in situations where industrial or other developments are proposed that will result in the loss of feeding, roosting or breeding areas. Frequently, all that can be said with confidence is that birds will be displaced and the population as a whole may suffer as a result.

John Goss-Custard and his colleagues have been studying Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* for more than 25 years and have developed a detailed, behaviour-based model that takes account of the ways that individuals respond to environmental factors and the choices they face from day to day when trying to meet their energy requirements. This sort of model has enabled them to make predictions in terms of population parameters, such as mortality. However, in a recent study (Goss-Custard *et al.* 2006), they have now shown that the same model can be extended successfully not only to a different type of estuarine situation but also to a different wader species.

In 1999, a controversial barrage across Cardiff Bay was completed and resulted in the loss of the inter-tidal feeding habitat that had been used regularly by 200 Redshanks *Tringa totanus*. This population subsequently relocated to an adjacent area of mudflats at Rhymney, where the local population rose from 300 to 500. Using a tailored version of their Oystercatcher model, Goss-Custard and his team estimated that the mortality rate of the combined population after barrage closure would increase by 3.65%, which is very close to the actual rate observed (3.17%). Further simulations helped to demonstrate that mortality was density dependent as a result of both increased interference between feeding birds and increased deple-

tion of the available prey in the mudflats.

Although not implemented, during the development of the barrage proposals flooding of some coastal fields to create high-level mudflats was suggested as a mitigation measure. Extending the use of their model and assuming that prey populations similar to those of normal high-level flats developed, they predicted that, although constituting less than 10% of the total area of mudflats lost, this small area would have reduced mortality rates to around those prior to the closure of the barrage. However, this was only because the proposed design of the new mudflats significantly increased the length of time when the mudflats were available to Redshanks to feed. Extra lower-level mudflats of similar area would not have offset the higher mortality.

Apart from throwing some further light on how Redshanks were affected by the Cardiff Bay barrage, this study is important because it shows how data, if collected and analysed appropriately, can be used in a more general and wider context. Often, when faced with a new threat to a new site, the temptation is to suggest that years of detailed research may be required. This study shows that this may not always be the case and that a few months' work building on existing studies and models could provide useful and reliable predictions. However, developing such robust models does depend on having high-quality, long-term data from which to start. It is to be hoped that organisations like CEH, for whom several of the authors work, will continue to secure the funding needed to continue such longer-term and strategic research.

Goss-Custard, J. D., Burton, N. H. K., Clark, N. A., Ferns, P. N., McGrorty, S., Reading, C. J., Rehfish, M. M., Stillman, R. A., Towend, I., West, A. D., & Worral, D. H. 2006. Test of a behaviour-based individual-based model: response of shorebird mortality to habitat loss. *Ecological Applications* 16:2215–2222.

## Breeding population estimates for Northern Wheatear in Britain

We agree with Sellers (2006) that published estimates of the size of the breeding population of Northern Wheatears *Oenanthe oenanthe* in Britain (most recently Gibbons *et al.* 1993) are probably too low. Indeed, we believe that Sellers's estimates are also likely to be too low. Nonetheless, we welcome his discussion and would like to add some recent insights and words of caution relating to the difficulty of calculating population estimates and the densities on which some are based.

Through the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), around 2,000–3,000 1-km squares have been visited by volunteer surveyors each spring since 1994. Surveys involve walking two 1-km transects across the square and recording birds present in 'distance bands' from the observer. For species which are encountered sufficiently frequently (contact with at least c. 60–80 individuals in the sample of surveyed squares), it is possible to derive density estimates by considering the distance over which individuals were detected and estimating the number missed (for further information see Newson *et al.* 2005). There are problems with this method if a species is highly associated with, or clearly avoids, features that tend to lie on the transect route (hedgerows are a classic example), but for an open-country species such as Northern Wheatear this is less of

a concern. Densities can be calculated for the whole 1-km square. Alternatively, since observers record habitat classifications at 200-m intervals, densities can be calculated for individual habitat types. Both these types of densities might be useful in deriving population estimates and work is currently underway to produce such figures for a variety of species. Prompted by Sellers (2006), we give the following results for Northern Wheatear in Britain.

Taking each BBS square as a whole (with its matrix of suitable and unsuitable habitats), and making the necessary corrections for distance and bird detectability, we can derive densities per 1-km square. It is important to note that BBS observers count individual adults, not nests, pairs or territorial males; all densities must thus be expressed in units of adults per km<sup>2</sup> and population estimates necessarily indicate numbers of adults. In spring 2000, the number of 1-km squares surveyed was 2,231, of which 97 held Wheatears. The frequency distribution of densities in occupied 1-km squares is shown in fig. 1. There is a very wide range, with some extreme values, but the median density is 13 adults per km<sup>2</sup>. This figure excludes zero densities from squares that might contain suitable habitat but no Wheatears. The black bars in fig. 1 indicate the mean density (and 95% confi-

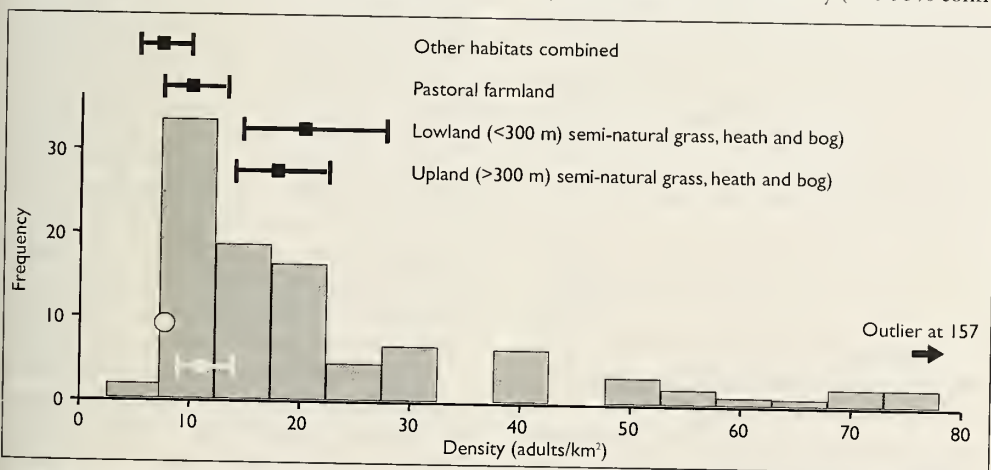


Fig. 1. Comparison of densities (adults/km<sup>2</sup>) of Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* in Britain (assuming that one pair is equivalent to two adults). The columns show the frequency distribution of 1-km-square-based densities derived from the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) in 2000. Black bars show habitat-based densities derived from BBS. The white bar shows densities estimated from Shetland, and the white circle the density from a Westmorland farm (see text).



dence limits) for four habitat types. These densities are calculated from BBS squares within the Wheatear's breeding range and include zero counts from sections of habitat where no Wheatears were located. These habitat-based densities compare well with the majority of square-based densities.

On the face of it, these figures are considerably higher than those presented by Sellers. However, the calculations made by Sellers concerning the Shetland population are slightly misleading because, of the 50 (not 48) 10-km squares occupied by Wheatears in 1988–91, none are entirely land. In fact, 40 of these 10-km squares have less than 50% land, some considerably less. If the densities are calculated on the basis of land area of Shetland rather than number of squares, the density per 10-km square is c. 460–690 pairs, or 9.2–13.8 adults per 1-km<sup>2</sup>, and much more in line with the BBS figures. This highlights a clear problem in that densities can be calculated in many different ways and it is not always easy to decide which is the most representative for the range over which it is to be applied. This density and that from the Westmorland farm (Robson & Williamson 1972) used in Sharrock (1976) and Gibbons *et al.* (1993) are shown for comparison in fig. 1. Given the variety of sources, methods and scales, they are remarkably consistent.

In terms of population estimates, the corrected Shetland densities applied to the actual land area of the 1,738 occupied 10-km squares yields a British population estimate of 320,000–480,000 pairs. The BBS counts in 1-km squares provide an alternative means of calculating an estimate which is independent of Atlas data. Across Britain, 1-km squares are selected randomly within regions (broadly speaking, counties) and surveyed by volunteers. The squares will probably lie on a gradient of suitability for Wheatears, with some containing none, some a few, and some many. Since the squares are chosen at random within regions, they should provide a representative reflection of the landscapes and bird populations within each region. It is therefore a straightforward process to extrapolate up within the region to give a population estimate (with confidence limits) for each region. These estimates can then be summed across regions to derive a British estimate with suitable confidence limits. In this way we estimate the British breeding population to be 540,000 adults (95% confi-

dence limits 530,000–550,000). This highlights another difficulty of population and density estimates – that of units. One cannot assume that the BBS figure equates to 270,000 pairs because the original field counts will have comprised an unknown combination of males and females. This is a general problem for population estimation and the conversion of individuals to pairs is likely to differ among species and even between seasons. For example, different weather patterns or visit timing may mean that more or fewer females are incubating and thus missed.

A tangential but significant matter is Sellers's comparison of densities with the relative abundance maps in Gibbons *et al.* (1993). Such comparisons need to be made with extreme care, for two reasons. First, the quantity mapped in the Atlas is a relative density; since it is not calibrated against absolute density estimates, it cannot provide estimates of the latter. Second, the measure used (proportion, out of the tetrads surveyed in a 10-km square, with positive records) is not related linearly to actual density; rather, it lies on a curve that gets flatter as density increases, approaching an asymptote of 1.0 (e.g. Greenwood & Robinson 2006), making it even more difficult to compare actual densities.

None of these observations changes Sellers's original contention that the *New Atlas* estimate of 55,000 pairs in Britain (Gibbons *et al.* 1993) is too low. We suggest that Sellers's revised estimate of 100,000–200,000 pairs may also be an underestimate, and there may be as many as 500,000–1,000,000 adults. Ongoing BBS analyses will seek to refine population and density estimates. Furthermore, during 2007–11, the BTO, in conjunction with the Scottish Ornithologists' Club and BirdWatch Ireland, will be running a new distribution Atlas of Britain and Ireland ([www.birdatlas.net](http://www.birdatlas.net)). This will seek to map distribution and abundance patterns and use the latest techniques and available density figures to derive improved population estimates. However, this letter and Sellers's note prove that population estimation is still not an exact science, and while it is relatively straightforward to derive meaningful population trends, it is still difficult to derive accurate and precise population estimates. There is an encouraging trend towards a more transparent approach to the production of population estimates, along with a greater realisation and appreciation of the limitations and

uncertainties of population estimates.

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The additional information provided by Gillings & Newson on the number of Northern Wheatears breeding in Britain is most welcome, and underpins nicely my concern that the figure of 55,000 breeding pairs from the 1988–91 Breeding Atlas is too low (Sellers 2006). The revised number I proposed was not intended to be anything more than a rough estimate, which is why the numbers given (100,000–200,000 bp) were quoted to one significant figure. The suggestion by Gillings & Newson that a correction be applied to the mean density per 10-km square for the squares covering Shetland is not unreasonable. However, as BWP makes clear (and this accords with my own experience of Wheatears in the north of Scotland), this is a species which has a liking for coastal habitats; so not making the correction gives a mean density per 10-km square that will unquestionably be on the low side, while making it gives one that is somewhat inflated. Either way, it does not matter much as there is little point in correcting the density in this way when one makes the gross assumption that the densities in Shetland 'seem to be roughly double those elsewhere', as I was obliged to do. The real problem is that the Shetland data are not entirely fit for the

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## Grey-and-white Yellow Wagtails in autumn

I found the recent paper on the identification and assessment of rare subspecies in Britain (Kehoe 2006) highly illuminating. It was, however, puzzling to read, in the discussion of 'Eastern Yellow Wagtail' *Motacilla flava tschutschensis*, the statement that 'Some genuinely grey-and-white birds in autumn may be of east Asian origin, although whether individuals of any of the west European or central Asian forms, such as *M. f. beema*, can appear

- Newson, S. E., Woodburn, R., Noble, D. G., & Baillie, S. R. 2005. Evaluating the Breeding Bird Survey for producing national population size and density estimates. *Bird Study* 52: 42–54.
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purpose to which they have been put (because of all that sea); but they were what was available to me at the time, and I remain confident that they provide a rough indication of what the population is.

Estimating the size of breeding populations is rarely straightforward whichever method is used. The use of BBS data described by Gillings & Newson is clearly a significant improvement on the 'density × range' type of estimate, but it is an approach that is still not without its complexities, the conversion of individuals into breeding pairs being perhaps the most obvious manifestation of this. Whichever approach is adopted there is a need, as Gillings & Newson point out, to ensure that the derivation of population estimates is made transparent, and that sources of uncertainty are fully evaluated and taken into account.

I think it is fair to say that Gillings, Newson and I are agreed that the figure of 55,000 bp for the Wheatear's breeding population is too low. A better figure is probably 2–10 times higher; I would put it towards the lower end of this range, Gillings & Newson nearer the upper end. Clearly there is ample scope for further refinement of the numbers involved.

similarly grey and white is unclear.

According to Alström & Mild (2003), as many as 'a quarter to one-third' of first-winter *beema* ('Sykes's Wagtail') – these 'mainly females but also a few males' – are grey-and-white variants, lacking green above and yellow below, and thus 'are closely similar to first-winter Citrine Wagtail [*M. citreola*]'. Alström & Mild also noted that up to 'one-third to almost half of first-winter' *M. f. feldegg* ('Black-headed



Wagtail') could be similarly grey and white, and that such individuals also occur, though much more rarely, in western subspecies such as *flava* ('Blue-headed Wagtail') and *thunbergi* ('Grey-headed Wagtail').

A photo of a grey-and-white first-winter female *beema*, taken in Israel in October 1985, was published in Shirihai & Gellert (1987).

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**EDITORIAL COMMENT** Chris Kehoe and Adam Rowlands have commented as follows: 'We thank Pete Combridge for raising this point. He is quite correct to say that grey-and-white plumage alone is not sufficient to indicate exact origins, but it does offer some clues. It remains to be seen whether grey-and-white individuals of east Asian taxa (for example *tschutschensis* or *taivana*) are actually identical in appearance to grey-and-white *beema* or *feldegg*; they may show differences in head pattern in ways that are not yet fully understood. First-winter *tschutschensis* (in the widest sense, incorporating, for example, *simillima*) and *taivana* appear to differ from each other in terms of head pattern, or at least most individuals do; and so do first-winter *beema* and *feldegg*. Although there has so far been no systematic study of the differences in head pattern between grey-and-white birds from these two subspecies groups, early indications are that *beema* and *tschutschensis* may be similar but that some individuals of *feldegg* and *taivana* may be rather distinctive and diagnosable.

'Alström & Mild were conscious of the shortage of material on which they based their conclusions and there is clearly more work to be done, especially in the light of the fact that some authorities have split the far-eastern taxa from western races based on molecular evidence which indicates that these races form a monophyletic group.

'While genuinely grey-and-white first-winters certainly occur within *beema* and *feldegg*, such birds are much more unusual in western races such as nominate *flava* and *thunbergi* – so-called "grey-and-white" birds typically show a brown tone in the mantle which contrasts with the back and rump (Alström & Mild, p. 283), although occasionally the upperparts may be rather uniformly pale grey



Michael McKee

78. This striking 'flava' wagtail *Motacilla flava* was photographed on Out Skerries, Shetland, in October 2005. Although superficially resembling Citrine Wagtail *M. citreola*, several features of the head pattern, together with the less contrasting wing-bars and tertial fringes, soon rule out that species. Assigning it to a particular subspecies of the Yellow Wagtail complex is not straightforward. There are faint brownish tones to the mantle – strictly speaking, it is 'greyish and whitish', not a true grey-and-white wagtail. From the photos alone, it would be hard to eliminate an atypical western bird, but in this case the bird's calls (which were described by the observers as closely resembling the harsh, buzzy calls of Citrine) mean that it most likely belongs to the *tschutschensis* group; although *feldegg* is difficult to rule out with confidence, that would typically show a less well-defined supercilium than this bird. Although field notes are important, good photographs like this and, where possible, sound recordings, greatly assist assessment, and BBRC very much welcomes informal submission of records such as this. In fact, these are probably rarer than Citrine Wagtails, so there should be no disappointment when a calling 'Citrine' lands and turns out not to be one after all!



(Alström & Mild, p. 271). Therefore, genuinely monochrome birds may well have originated from the Far East or be either *beema* or *feldegg*. It should be noted too that the figures for grey-and-white *feldegg* and *beema* quoted by Pete Combridge include individuals that might be better described as “greyish and whitish” but not actually monochrome – the proportion that are genuinely grey and white is rather smaller than he suggests, as Alström & Mild included birds with brown tones in the mantle in their figures.

‘To qualify as genuinely grey and white, a bird should appear as monochrome as a first-winter Citrine Wagtail, i.e. it should entirely lack brown or buff tones in the mantle, back and rump and not just lack greenish or yellowish tones anywhere. It should be remembered too that although a proportion of far-eastern first-winters (mostly females) are monochrome, not all of them are.

‘Voice, preferably recorded, may offer a vital piece of evidence when trying to establish origins (*beema* typically calls rather like *flava* and *flavissima* but *feldegg* and the far-eastern races have a more rasping, Citrine Wagtail-like call), but we continue to welcome good-quality images and detailed notes on grey-and-white birds. DNA evidence is ideal but may not be the only way of making an identification.’

### The vice-county system

I would very much like to support Stephen Morrison in his plea for bird recording to follow the system employed for other biological groups and use Watsonian vice-counties (VC) as recording areas (*Brit. Birds* 100: 62–63). It has long been a nonsense that, in so much of the UK, many ignore this well-tried and sensible approach. Any researcher looking at UK ornithology in years to come may well be extremely confused.

There is no better place to examine the farce that exists than in East Anglia, where different approaches are taken by my native Suffolk, and our neighbours in Norfolk. Suffolk adopts the VC system, encouraged by the Suffolk Biological Records Centre and the Suffolk Naturalists’ Society (who produce the county report, *Suffolk Birds*). This is not the case in Norfolk where, after the changes to county boundaries in 1974, the lovable and late Michael Seago proceeded to plunder all records from the area still in Watsonian Suffolk and add them to the Norfolk list. Norfolk continues to stick rigidly to the ‘new’ Norfolk boundary.

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It is not difficult to see the problems coming. For example, Norfolk eagerly grabbed Britain’s first Allen’s Gull *Porphyryula alleni*, a bird taken alive on a fishing boat off Hopton in 1902. This piece of contraband appears boldly in *Birds of Norfolk* (Taylor *et al.*, 1999, Christopher Helm), and appears equally boldly in *Birds of Suffolk* (Piotrowski, 2003, Christopher Helm). Both volumes are the most contemporary county avifaunas, and incidentally produced by the same publisher. This is not the only record in dispute; there are many old ones and of course new ones too – a recent Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus* was published as a first for both Norfolk and Suffolk in the respective reports but it was the same bird in the same field!

The current situation is rather silly and does nothing for birds; the key thing is clearly to use consistent boundaries to provide the best scientific assessment of the status of birds in a particular area. Perhaps ACRE can lead on this and bring everyone to their senses; the longer this goes on, the worse it will get.

Stephen Morrison (*Brit. Birds* 100: 62–63) deserves sympathy from anyone with experience of the boundary problems in local ornithology. Outsiders will be unwilling to comment on his particular difficulties, though they may question the actual existence of raw data from before 1974. In some counties (including our own), the once-universal record

cards have been destroyed for lack of interest or storage space and, even if they did exist, many would include notes from both sides of the new boundaries; these would have to be copied for another county’s records.

However, there are much more potent and practical objections to the adoption of a vice-county system, and to understand these we

must go back over the history. Watson's achievement was three-fold: the subdivision of the largest counties; the elimination of detachments (as in Flint, Worcestershire and East Dunbarton); and the absorption of very small counties into larger neighbours (so Rutland, Kinross, Clackmannan and Nairn vanished). All the outer boundaries of subdivided counties remained the same and, most importantly, could be found on Ordnance Survey maps. So in England, 21 counties were identical to the existing administrative divisions and two (Leicestershire and Westmorland) absorbed substantial parts of others. The rest were divided into two units, apart from Yorkshire, which had five. Despite some tidying of administrative boundaries in the 1890s, and a few later urban expansions into neighbouring counties (as in Sheffield, Bristol and Manchester), the overall medieval pattern persisted until 1974.

Meanwhile, between 1850 and the 1970s, English counties began recording birds through their local natural-history societies. Towards the end of that period, annual bird reports had come to be produced largely by 'bird clubs' – as they still are, despite recent signs of strain in the system. Their growth widened the gap between ornithology and other zoological and botanical studies at a local level. Though sponsorship has increased, these reports are basically paid for by the clubs' membership. Most such societies have little interest beyond birds. In 1974, some had to take decisions on how they were to deal with boundary change, and the pattern that we now have is largely the result of the policies adopted then. It is complicated, thoroughly British in the apparent chaos of its diversity, and perhaps 'institutionalised'. But these are the institutions that do the work and national organisations have to depend on this amateur basis. Some national recording (for example, the BTO Ringing Scheme) is even more closely tied to administrative boundaries than the bird clubs are. They have one great advantage: such borders are clearly marked on maps that everyone has. One should also remember that conservation initiatives are often now part of the business of local authorities, whose boundaries are close to those of bird-recording areas.

Even if there was widespread enthusiasm for vice-counties, a change in their favour is now inconceivable, as it would involve altering the attitudes and practices of thousands of people and hundreds of organisations, as well as enormous labour, not 'merely... the full co-operation of county recorders'! Regular bird-reporters must vastly outnumber the combined total of those who record other forms of wildlife. That being said, vice-counties do play a small part in ornithological recording. In Wales, a reliance on them helped to preserve the old county pattern from 1974 to 1995, when some of it was restored. By insisting on its vice-county boundaries, Surrey held on to its old area (and refused to accept the parts of West Middlesex that it was given); Suffolk still asserts its claim to the south side of Breydon Water (see above); and the pattern of Yorkshire recording is supposedly Watson's five divisions, though some edges have been clipped by other counties, and the many district bird reports are not based upon them.

We are at present working on a paper dealing with the nomenclature and extent of recording areas. There is still much confusion here, especially in the way in which they are used in the national literature. These problems were apparent in important recent contributions (notably Banks *et al.* 2006, Dudley *et al.* 2006), as well as in the recent BBRC annual report (Fraser *et al.* 2007). Our object will be to suggest a standard system based on the situation as it is, not as we might want it to be. It will take full account of local preferences (and even prejudices) and will record inconsistencies. We hope that it may be accepted by the national organisations.

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# Reviews

## HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF THE WORLD. VOL. 11: OLD WORLD FLYCATCHERS TO OLD WORLD WARBLERS

Edited by Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott and David Christie. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. 2006. 800 pages; 55 colour plates; 343 colour photographs; 733 distribution maps. ISBN 84-96553-06-X. Hardback, £138.00.

The seemingly inexorable advance to completion of this magnificent compilation continues apace with the publication of Volume 11. Having read umpteen reviews and seriously considered all of the pre-publication offers, for some reason I had still not owned a single volume of *HBW* and, indeed, had not had the chance to study one in any detail until Volume 11 thumped down onto my desk. The superb illustrations of a male Blue-and-white Flycatcher *Cyanoptila cyanomelaena* and Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* on the dust cover proved to be a worthy preparation for what lay within.

Volume 11 includes some of the most beautiful of all the passerines, with numerous gorgeous Asian flycatchers (Muscicapidae) and allies featuring highly, and also some of the most challenging identification issues, for example, within the cisticolas (Cisticolidae). In summary, the families included are Old World flycatchers, batistes and wattle-eyes (Platysteiridae), fantails (Rhipiduridae), monarch-flycatchers (Monarchidae), kinglets and firecrests (Regulidae), gnatcatchers (Poliopitidae), cisticolas and allies, and Old World warblers (Sylviidae).

In the extensive introductory essay in Volume 11, Çagan Hakkı Şekercioğlu, of Stanford University, discusses the 'Ecological Significance of Bird Populations'. This is a particularly timely reminder of the role of bird species in our world and of the importance of main-

taining species diversity at a time when so many species are threatened by Man's activities. A glance through the species accounts quickly shows the enormous pressure on biodiversity in southeast Asia, where deforestation and habitat destruction continue at a relentless pace.

As a newcomer to the series, the introductions to the bird families were a revelation. The amount of useful information distilled into these accounts is highly readable and yet concise enough to hold the reader's attention to the last paragraph. The ecology of each family is analysed through constant reference to different members of the group, building into what is almost a mini-monograph when combined with the individual species accounts. Whether it be the migration strategy of the Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* or the description of the mournful 3–4 note 'more time to eat' song of the Large Niltava *Niltava grandis*, there is an in-depth wealth of well-researched and clearly written, but easily understood information distilled into a concise format.

A brief look at taxonomic treatment of West Palearctic species revealed a number of surprising differences between *HBW* and the position of BOURC and BB which is summarised by Collinson (*Brit. Birds* 99: 306–323). There also appears to be no obvious consistency in the taxonomy adopted by *HBW*, with various authorities seemingly being picked at random. For example, *HBW* treats the Greenish Warbler complex as three species: Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*, Two-barred Greenish Warbler *Ph. plumbeitarsus* and Green Warbler *Ph. nitidus*. Similarly, the three distinct groupings of 'Lesser Whitethroat' are treated as separate species: Lesser Whitethroat *S. curruca*, Desert Lesser Whitethroat *S. minula* and Hume's Whitethroat *S. althaea*. On the other hand, *HBW* still lumps Asian Desert S.

## HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF THE WORLD



nana and African Desert Warblers *S. deserti*, treats Atlas Flycatcher *Ficedula speculigera* within Pied Flycatcher *F. hypoleuca* and, surprisingly, maintains Red-breasted *F. parva* and Taiga Flycatchers *F. albicilla* as races of the same species. Indeed, the paper by Lars Svensson *et al.* (*Brit. Birds* 98: 538–541) discussing 'Species Limits in the Red-breasted Flycatcher' is not even included in the bibliography, although Svensson is one of the authors of this volume. All the relevant species texts, however, do point out where taxonomic research is continuing or is in need of further investigation.

The 55 plates cover all of the species included in the volume, with several of the important subspecies also being illustrated. All of the plates are of a high standard and there is a generally excellent consistency amongst the artists involved.

As a lover of good bird-photography, I appreciated the breadth of species coverage but, more particularly, the lengths to which the editors have gone to obtain photographs of birds illustrating such a huge variety of behavioural characteristics; the hovering Arctic Warbler *Ph. borealis* and the insect it has knocked off the underside of the leaf is typical of the sort of shot so difficult to obtain and yet so often overlooked in publications designed around illustrative poses. For sheer mouth-watering appeal,



check the page with male Yellow-rumped *F. zanthopygia*, Mugimaki *F. mugimaki* and Narcissus Flycatchers *F. narcissina*, then sell your camera gear! The photo captions do more than just name the species: they explain the intricacies of the behaviour illustrated and link to further detailed information in the main species texts. The use of high-quality paper ensures that the photographs are shown at

their best, with true colours and excellent reproduction. The typographical layout throughout is simple and yet effective, making the book a joy to research, browse and study in depth; only the indentation in your knees after a couple of hours reading will demonstrate the literal weight of the volume!

As a source of reference, *HBW* is incomparable; as a source of inspiration, it is unmatched. It is

simply a treasure trove of information which is easily accessible, eminently readable and all presented in an artistic production contemporaneous with the best in literary publications. If, like me, you have yet to dig deep, then take a good look and make the big leap; if you already have the previous volumes, then this review will be academic.

Graham Catley

**DVD COMPILATION OF  
KENT BIRD REPORTS  
1952–2002 AND  
BIRDS OF KENT 1981**

By Kent Ornithological Society,  
2006. Single DVD plus  
explanatory leaflet  
(also available on 2 CDs).  
Price £10.00 to KOS members,  
£20.00 to non-members;  
to order, visit  
[www.kentos.org.uk/  
Membership/KBRDisk.htm](http://www.kentos.org.uk/Membership/KBRDisk.htm)

I have lost count of the number of times I have tried to locate a specific reference in my home library of journals and county reports, only to have to retreat in exasperation, leaving a melee of annual indexes and a thoroughly disorganised library scattered around me. If only there was a more efficient means of searching print-based information! These days there is such a solution, and this DVD from the Kent Ornithological Society (KOS) is one such example.

Small, specialist publishers, which produce many of the birding journals and annual reports, typically have neither the technical know-how nor the financial means to develop electronic storage of their publications. This has meant that, other than ordering back-issues or purchasing unwanted collections, advertised in the classifieds, access to most publishers' back-catalogues of former content is severely restricted. Furthermore, the lack of an electronic companion to such works means that the archives can be searched

comprehensively only by time-consuming use of paper indexes or employing the services of a few specialist indexing companies.

Things are beginning to change, however, and the ease with which documents can now be scanned, digitised and converted to retrievable formats, such as PDF files, is driving a groundswell of mass digitisation. So much so that if, as a publisher, you don't soon do it yourself, you may well find that someone has already scanned and distributed your archive for you! Indeed, the behemoth known as *Google* is rolling out its 'Google Book Search' project using machines each capable of scanning 20,000 pages per day, and making the files so produced freely searchable by all and sundry – and consequently running roughshod over publishers' perceptions of their own copyright.

Having responded to an offer to support the publication of the original *Birds of Kent* (Taylor *et al.*, 1981) by placing a pre-publication order, I was delighted to learn that the KOS has not only digitised that book but has also made it available on a single DVD, together with scans of the entire set of the *Kent Bird Report* (51 annual reports from 1952 to 2002). The DVD is accompanied by a brief information sheet giving advice on how to load the disk into a computer and how to view and search the PDF files using Adobe Acrobat Reader software. For every volume, each page has been scanned in full colour and concatenated into a single file. The software allows each page to be magnified on screen,



handy if you would have struggled to read some of the original smaller font sizes, while use of your keyboard's arrows allows efficient skipping from page to page, avoiding the need for endless 'scrolling' with your mouse. The quality of the scanning seems excellent, and the maps, tables, photos and illustrations remain highly usable.

The software enables users to perform text-searching for words or exact phrases in the opened file. It is also possible to perform a single search across the entire set of PDF files on the DVD, which is extremely useful for collating links to text, to ensure that every occurrence of a particular species within the complete set of 51 annual reports plus the book is identified. It wasn't long before I found myself taking full advantage of the search facility – effortlessly exploring the immediate questions that came to me: which is the earliest report featuring a contribution from the ornithological luminary Peter J. Grant? (answer: 1958); how many singing Savi's Warblers *Locustella luscinioides* were at Stodmarsh when I undertook an early twitch there 30 years ago? (answer: four).

Putting this into perspective, it is awe-inspiring that one can literally carry much of Kent's ornithological history in something that is smaller than an envelope and as light as a feather and, at a stroke, fill in all the blank decades of your current traditional paper archive. So have paper-based books, journals and reports now had their

day? I don't think so. They are, after all, highly 'natural' to read, attractive, portable and borrowable, and, unlike computers, can be used independently of a power supply. But the relentless march of digitisation will complement paper-based communication and will change permanently the historical and current birding world

by making it ever more accessible to an increasingly wide audience. The KOS is to be congratulated for making this historical archive of the county's fascinating avifauna so affordably available. One can only look forward to other publishers following their example.

David H. Hatton

**FIELD GUIDE TO THE  
DRAGONFLIES OF BRITAIN  
AND EUROPE**

Edited by Klaas-Douwe B. Dijkstra. Illustrated by Richard Lewington.

British Wildlife Publishing, Gillingham, 2006.  
320 pages; over 1,000 illustrations and photographs.  
ISBN 0-9531399-4-8.  
Softback, £21.95,  
hardback, £30.00.

appearance, clarity and ease of use, and all illustrated by Richard Lewington. Perhaps better known to *BB* readers as brother of Ian, county recorder for Oxfordshire and bird illustrator, Richard is an outstanding artist in his own right, and widely accepted as the best in his chosen field. Although this book uses some of his illustrations from the *Field Guide to the Dragonflies and Damselflies of Great Britain and Ireland*, from the same stable, this is a completely new book. It covers all of Europe (except Russia), western Turkey, northwest Africa and the Atlantic islands.

After the introductory chapters, there is species-by-species coverage, with excellent colour photos

supplementing the colour paintings and diagrams, distribution maps and text by a pan-European team of authors. Traditionalists may balk at some of the new, but decidedly less parochial, vernacular names (if *BB* readers feel confused by the long-running debate on English bird names, take a deep breath before diving into the world of vernacular names for Odonata!), but there is very little else to find fault with. Given that we nearly all have a European perspective now, if you want an authoritative, colourful and attractive book on identifying dragonflies there really is only one choice.

Mike Pennington

**A LIFE IN DETAIL:  
TERANCE JAMES BOND**

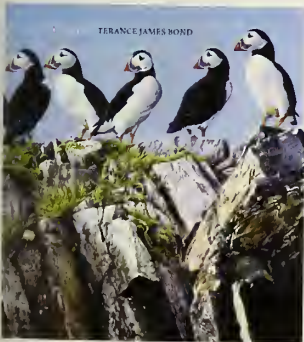
Langford Press, Peterborough, 2006.  
180 pages; many colour paintings.  
ISBN 1-904078-17-6.  
Hardback, £35.00.

This represents yet another high-quality bird-art book in the Wildlife Art Series published by Langford Press. This book, showcasing the work of Terance James Bond, provides quite a contrast to some of the others in the series. Here we are given an insight into the paintings, working methods and philosophies of an artist who drafts and paints his compositions with meticulous planning and thought. Many of you will already be familiar with his work through his RSPB calendars; indeed you may have even bought one – over one and a half million have sold throughout the world so far. But I suspect that few own an original Bond; the Puffin *Fratercula arctica* painting that adorns the front cover could have been yours at a recent exhibition for £22,000. This is a serious artist! Within the gen-

erous 180 pages you can study his 'feather perfect' birds placed carefully in their habitat. Attention to detail is paramount, an insignificant blade of grass is painted with the same precision as a bird's eye – and he seems to have an affinity with bits of rope. I particularly like his use of a limited palette in Tawny Owl (*Strix aluco*) reproduced on the end pages. Alongside each painting are texts that help to explain what makes him tick as an artist.

It is a delight that Langford Press is continuing to bring out these books on so many different artists with such a diverse approach to their craft. There is something to cater for all tastes. Long may it continue.

Dan Powell



# News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

## RSPB accused of windfarm hypocrisy

A gale of protest has blown up in the Western Isles following the RSPB's latest attack on the planned windfarm on Lewis. Lewis Wind Power plans to build a giant windfarm of 181 turbines on the Lewis Peatlands Special Protection Area. The original plan was for 234 turbines, which would have made it the largest onshore windfarm in the world, but the developer reduced the number of turbines following protests by the RSPB and some local residents. The peatlands hold 8% (1,800 pairs) of the UK's breeding European Golden Plovers *Pluvialis apricaria*, while the RSPB has particularly highlighted potential losses of Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos*, Merlins *Falco columbarius* and Red-throated Divers *Gavia stellata* through collisions with turbine blades at the proposed site.

Now the Society is targeting the economics of the windfarm, and has analysed the figures for job creation estimated by Lewis Wind Power's consultants, who claim that 137 jobs will be supported during the development phase and a further 233 jobs once the windfarm becomes operational. However, consultants employed by RSPB say that these figures are wildly optimistic and that 70% fewer jobs than the developers claim will result from the project.

Stephen Lucas, Director of Economics at consultancy DTZ said: 'Our own assessment is that the development will support at best around 70 jobs in the Western Isles, and even this ignores the potentially harmful effects of the development on the Isles' tourism economy and the jobs that visitors support. Factoring in the potential harmful effects on tourism – which the developer has not attempted to do – could mean that this project could result in a net negative impact on the local economy.' DTZ assumed a 10% contraction in the tourism industry on Lewis, resulting in the loss of around 120 jobs and at least £4m in direct spending.

But the RSPB's latest onslaught on the Hebridean windfarm has drawn a stinging comparison with its lack of opposition to an even bigger windfarm planned for Shetland, a windfarm backed by the RSPB's 'green energy' partner Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE). The £1-billion Shetland windfarm would see 200 turbines erected on the moorland of central Mainland. This would leapfrog the Lewis development to become the largest onshore windfarm in the world. But the RSPB, which receives £20.00 from SSE for every member who signs up for the electricity company's RSPB Energy scheme,

has not mounted a campaign against the Shetland windfarm.

MSP for the Western Isles, Alasdair Morrison (a staunch supporter of the Lewis windfarm), has questioned this stance: 'It is remarkable that the RSPB is violently opposed to the renewable energy development on Lewis yet, when there is a direct financial hook-up between themselves and the developers, in the Shetland Islands, they are silent on the merits or dismerits. The RSPB, in my mind, is a discredited organisation and is only now noted for its inconsistency and duplicity.'

An RSPB spokesman said: 'We have not been silent on the Shetland proposal – rather, we have indicated some support for it, albeit with caveats regarding the proposed location of some of the turbines. Our view is based on issues related to birds, rather than our commercial arrangement with SSE, which we are also open about.' He added that the RSPB Energy scheme made up only a 'small percentage' of the Society's income and that they were currently objecting to two smaller SSE windfarms.

The consultation period on the Lewis windfarm closed on 5th February and a decision will now be taken by the Scottish Executive.

## Napoli spill hits Guillemot wrecked by the Erika

While the looters were wheeling away BMW motorbikes from the shores of east Devon, more altruistic beachcombers were collecting oiled seabirds washed up after the container ship *Napoli* ran aground in late January. Among the 700 birds taken into care by 31st January was an unlucky Common Guillemot *Uria aalge* that had previously been oiled in the *Erika* spill

off northwest France in December 1999, rehabilitated and released back to sea in January 2000. Seven years later it was oiled again but sadly this time it failed to recover from its ordeal.

Great Northern Divers *Gavia immer* have also been oiled in the latest spill and there are fears that the Endangered Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus* may

be another species caught up in the slick. The RSPB estimates that 10,000 seabirds may have died following the leak of 200 tonnes of oil from the *Napoli*. The BTO reports that it is 'very bad news indeed for Welsh and Irish seabirds'.

So far, 15 ringed birds have been found and reported back to the BTO, mostly Common Guillemots. Six of these were from Great



Saltee Island, Co. Wexford, among them a 21-year-old Razorbill *Alca torda* (now dead). Others were from Sanda Island in Argyll & Bute, Skomer Island in Pembrokeshire (the largest breeding colony of Guillemots in Wales) and even as far afield as Fair Isle in Shetland.

The BTO's Mark Grantham commented: 'This isn't a major oil spill, but it still looks as if thou-

sands of birds may have been affected. The thing that makes this particularly serious is that most of these birds were adults en route to their breeding colonies in Wales and Ireland. It is now a race against time to get these birds cleaned up and released back to sea in time to get into breeding condition for this summer. With so many dead and sick birds, this spill will have a direct impact on the colonies in

which these birds breed.' The cliffs of Britain & Ireland are home to over one million pairs of Guillemots, around 30% of the European population and 12% of the world population. Every year, around 10,000 Guillemots are ringed in colonies around the country. If you find a ringed or colour-ringed bird, you can report it to the BTO via their website [www.ring.ac](http://www.ring.ac)

## 115,000 RSPB members turn up the heat on Malta

The RSPB recently sent a delegation to Malta to doorstep the island's Prime Minister as he continues to flout EU law and threatens another spring hunting season. A 115,000-signature petition from RSPB supporters was delivered to the Maltese PM's official residence on 29th January after he had refused three previous invitations by the RSPB and BirdLife Malta to accept the petition personally. At the same time, an analysis by BirdLife Malta showed that birds from 38 countries, including the UK, have been shot or trapped across the Maltese islands.

The petition, which had to be left on the Prime Minister's doorstep, calls for Dr Lawrence Gonzi and his government to 'respect the EU bird-protection laws, make sure those laws are enforced and stop spring hunting in Malta'. During a press conference in Malta, Alistair Gammell, Director of International Operations at RSPB, expressed his surprise at the PM's persistent refusal to meet BirdLife Malta, considering

his willingness to meet the hunters to discuss their priorities.

Joseph Mangion, BirdLife Malta's President, said: 'Fourteen bird species have been recorded in Malta that had been ringed in various parts of the UK. In many of these cases, the birds were found because they had been either shot or trapped – thus highlighting the plight of migratory birds from all over Europe. None of these 14 species is on the list for permitted hunting in Malta, and only two of the species can be lawfully trapped until a transition period expires in 2008, when trapping must end completely.'

Malta is widely regarded as the worst offender against the EU Birds Directive of all the 27 member countries. While changes in Maltese hunting legislation were a step in the right direction, the Maltese Government has continued to allow spring hunting of Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* and Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* and the spring trapping of finches (Fringillidae) since it joined the EU in 2004,

despite both activities being in clear breach of European law.

The European Commission opened an infringement procedure against Malta in June 2006. Despite pressure from the EU and conservation organisations in Malta and Europe, the Maltese Government recently challenged the Commission at a meeting in Brussels and suggested that they would allow spring hunting again in 2007.

A study conducted by BirdLife Malta's conservation manager, Dr Andre Raine, has looked at those birds which have either been ringed elsewhere and recovered in Malta or ringed in Malta and recovered elsewhere. Although the chances of ringed birds being recovered are small, the analysis reveals that many UK-ringed birds have been recovered in Malta, after being either trapped or shot. The list includes Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*, Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*, Great Skua *Catharacta skua*, Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*, Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* and Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*.

## Birdfair update

The 2006 British Birdwatching Fair was another record breaker. A cheque for £215,000 has been presented to BirdLife to fund the work of saving the Pacific's parrots (Psittacidae), the theme of last August's Birdfair, which was attended by 19,000 people. This sum takes the total raised for bird conservation since 1989 by the Rutland Water Birdfairs to a staggering £1.7 million.

BirdLife Chief Executive Dr Michael Rands said: 'The British Birdwatching Fair has been incredibly important in helping us achieve a great deal towards bird conservation across the world. BirdLife International would like to express thanks to the British Birdwatching Fair and the thousands of people who visited last year and gave so generously.'

Each year the Birdfair

([www.birdfair.org.uk](http://www.birdfair.org.uk)) has raised funds for a specific conservation project but this is set to change over the next two years. In 2007 and 2008, Birdfair funds will be targeted at conservation of Critically Endangered species worldwide, BirdLife's top priority. The 2007 Birdfair takes place over the weekend of 17th–19th August and the 2008 fair will be held on 15th–17th August.

## Christopher Helm

Christopher Helm died on 20th January, shortly before his 70th birthday. A towering presence in ornithological publishing – and in real life at 2 m tall – Christopher

came to the aid of *BB* as it struggled to remain viable in the late 1990s. A full obituary will appear in *BB* in due course; in the meantime, donations in his memory can

be made to the Cystic Fibrosis Trust, c/o C. Waterhouse & Sons, High Street, Burwash, East Sussex TN19 7ET, with a note mentioning Christopher.

## New recorders

Kevin Clements is the new West Midlands County Bird Recorder. Kevin's contact details are 26 Hambrook Close, Dunstall Park, Wolverhampton, West Midlands WV6 0XA; e-mail [west-mids-recorder@westmidlandbirdclub.com](mailto:west-mids-recorder@westmidlandbirdclub.com); tel. 01902 568997.

Paul Harvey has taken over from Micky Maher as Recorder for Shetland. Contact Paul at the Shetland Biological Records Centre, Shetland Amenity Trust, Gartspool, Lerwick ZE1 0NY; e-mail [sbrc@zetnet.co.uk](mailto:sbrc@zetnet.co.uk); tel. 01595 694688.

Brian Rabbitts has taken over from Andrew Stevenson as Recorder for the Western Isles. Brian's contact details are 6 Carinish, North Uist, Outer Hebrides HS6 5HL; e-mail [rabbitts@hebrides.net](mailto:rabbitts@hebrides.net); tel. 01876 580328.

Geri Thomas has taken over from Steve Moon as Recorder for East Glamorgan. Contact Geri at 9 Julians Close, Gelligaer, Hengoed, Glamorgan CF82 8DT; e-mail [geri.thomas@btopenworld.com](mailto:geri.thomas@btopenworld.com); tel. 01443 836949.

## BTO Atlas 2007–2011

*BB* editorial board member Dawn Balmer has been appointed as Atlas Co-ordinator for the forthcoming combined breeding and wintering BTO Atlas, fieldwork for which will be conducted between 2007 and 2011. Congratulations Dawn! This will be the third breeding-bird atlas for Britain & Ireland – but the first to be edited by a woman. Conversely, the forthcoming *Birds of Scotland* ([www.birdsofscotland.org.uk](http://www.birdsofscotland.org.uk)), the third version of a Scottish avifauna, will be the first to be edited by men!

# Recent reports

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Eric Dempsey

This summary of unchecked reports covers early January to early February 2007.

Falcated Duck *Anas falcata* Strumpshaw Fen (Norfolk), 20th January; Cliffe (Kent), long-stayer to 3rd February. Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors* North Bull Island (Co. Dublin), long-stayer to 21st January. Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis* Clea Lakes (Co. Down), long-stayer to 4th February; Sonning Eye Gravel-pits (Oxfordshire), long-stayer to 4th February; Benbecula (Western Isles), two long-stayers to 4th February, one to 7th. Black Scoter *Melanitta americana* Llanfairfechan (Conwy), long-stayer to 7th February. Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola* Lough



79. Juvenile Pacific Diver *Gavia pacifica*, Farnham Gravel-pits, North Yorkshire, February 2007.



80. Juvenile Pacific Diver *Gavia pacifica*, Farnham Gravel-pits, North Yorkshire, February 2007.

Atedaun (Co. Clare), long-stayer to 6th February; Unst (Shetland), long-stayer to 20th January. Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica* Quoile Pondage (Co. Down), long-stayer to at least 26th January; Callander (Forth), long-stayer to 8th February.

Pacific Diver *Gavia pacifica* Farnham Gravel-pits (North Yorkshire), from about 10th January to

4th February; Llys-y-Fran Reservoir (Pembrokeshire), 2nd–5th February.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* Sevenoaks (Kent), 31st January; Pulborough Brooks (West Sussex), 1st February; Otterton (Devon), long-stayer to 27th January. Great White Egret *Ardea alba* Sheppey (Kent), 13th January; Walberswick (Suffolk), 7th February; Blashford Lakes (Hampshire), long-stayer to 21st January.

'Black-eared Kite' *Milvus migrans lineatus* Snettisham (Norfolk), long-stayer to 4th February. Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus* Stepper Point (Cornwall), at least 30th–31st January.

American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* Maer Lake (Devon), 19th–20th January. Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* Dundalk (Co. Louth), 9th–31st January; Inland Sea (Anglesey), 26th–29th January; Oare Marshes (Kent), long-stayer to 7th February. Lesser



81. First-winter Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*, Thornham, Norfolk, January 2007.

Iain Leach



Chris Galvin



82. First-winter male 'Black-throated Thrush' *Turdus ruficollis atrogularis* Rothesay, Isle of Bute, February 2007.

**Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes* Thornham (Norfolk), 13th January to 4th February; Roscarberry (Co. Cork), long-stayer to 23rd January. **Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularius* Hayle Estuary (Cornwall), long-stayer to 8th February.

**Laughing Gull** *Larus atricilla* In Devon, one Newton Abbot area, 13th–20th January, Stover, 24th–25th January and Preston, 4th February. **Franklin's Gull** *Larus pipixcan* Aberystwyth (Ceredigion), 19th January. **Bonaparte's Gull**

*Larus philadelphia* Whitehead (Co. Antrim), 9th–21st January; Dingle (Co. Kerry), 15th January; Otter Estuary (Devon), 31st January to 2nd February; Ferryden (Angus), long-stayer to 8th February; St Mary's and Tresco (Scilly), long-stayer to 7th February. **'American Herring Gull'** *Larus argentatus smithsonianus*, Nimmo's Pier (Co. Galway), 14th–31st January. **Forster's Tern** *Sterna forsteri* Nimmo's Pier, 25th January to 4th February; Pilmore Strand (Co. Cork), 28th January to at least 6th February.

Ian Butler



83. First-winter American Robin *Turdus migratorius*, Bingley, West Yorkshire, January 2007.

**Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus* Rogerstown (Co. Dublin), long-stayer to 20th January. **'Black-throated Thrush'** *Turdus ruficollis atrogularis* Rothesay (Bute), at least 28th January to 7th February. **American Robin** *Turdus migratorius* Bingley (West Yorkshire), at least 24th January to 4th February. **Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus* Rainham Marshes (Greater London/ Essex), long-stayer to 3rd February, joined by at least one other, 14th January. **Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla* Amwell Gravel-pits (Hertfordshire), 31st January to 7th February.



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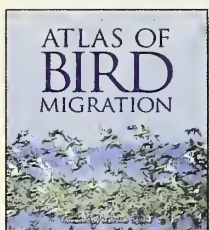
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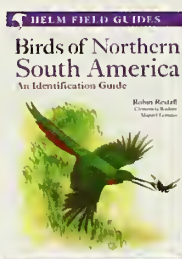
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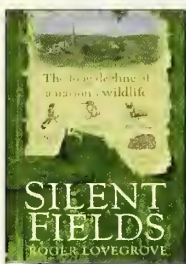


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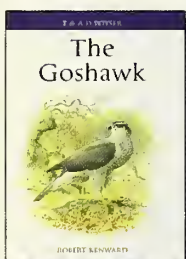
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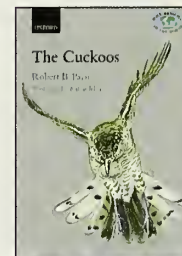
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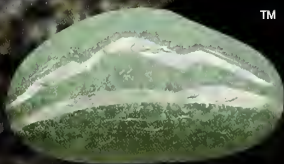
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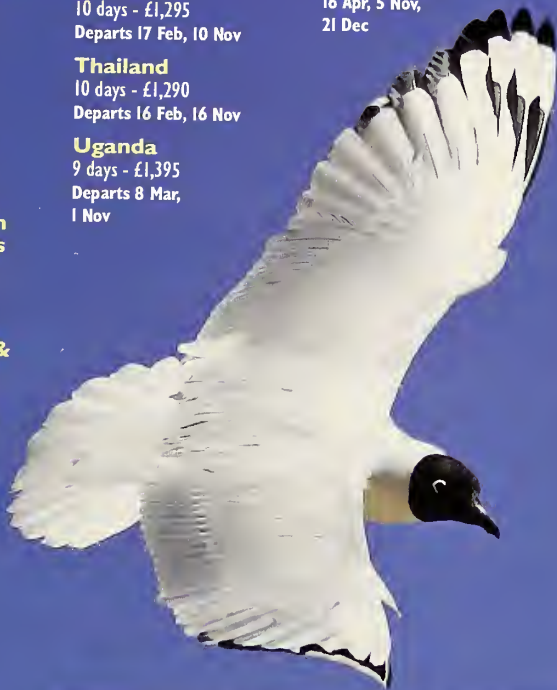
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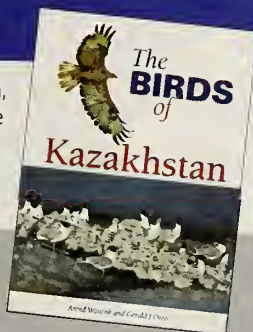


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# The Danube Delta: Europe's remarkable wetland

Paul Goriup, Grigore Baboianu and  
Joseph Chernichko



John Cox

Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*, Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus* and other birds of the Danube.

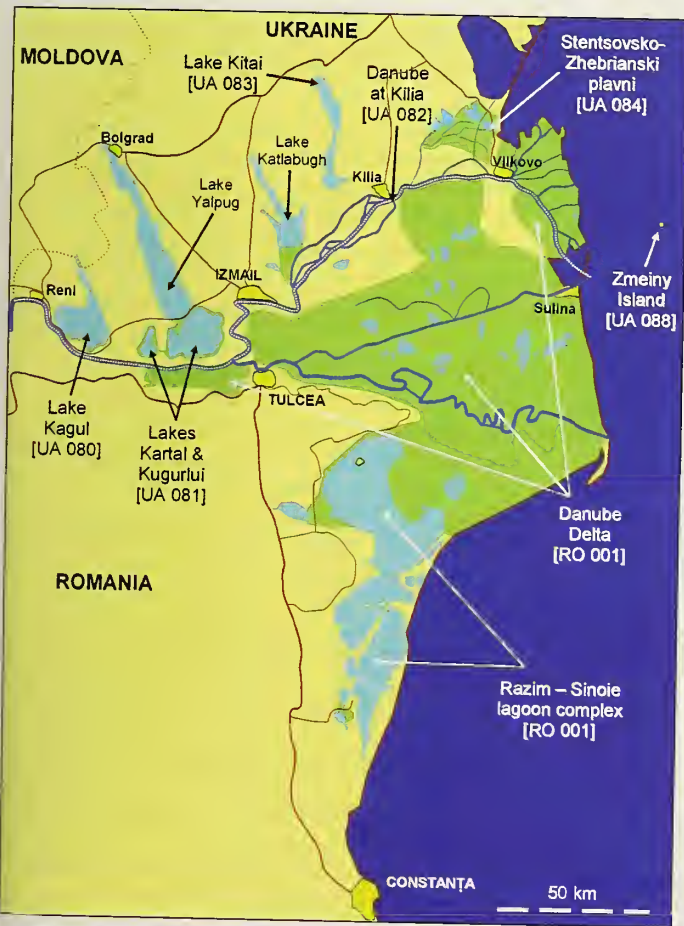
**ABSTRACT** The Danube is the largest European river west of the Volga, flowing from the German Black Forest to the northwest coast of the Black Sea, and within the lower Danube region there are seven Important Bird Areas (IBAs). Its global importance derives primarily from the numbers of waterbirds with unfavourable conservation status in Europe that breed, migrate through or winter in the region. Of 93 species of European concern that occur, 12 are globally threatened or near-threatened species, including Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis*, Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus* and Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*. In winter, the region can host over a million waterbirds. Conservation and management issues are discussed, in particular those which relate to the human impact on the delta, including effects upstream. The past 50 years have seen the worst degradation of the delta, relating especially to changes in sediment load and water quality but also to the problems of overfishing and the spread of alien species, but despite this the area remains of outstanding ornithological importance on a global scale.

When I (PG) started birding as a schoolboy, in 1968, one of the first books I read was *Portrait of a River* (Mountfort 1962), illustrated with evocative photographs by Eric Hosking. From that moment on, I was gripped by the urge to travel to the lower Danube. When the chance finally came, in 1991, in the wake of the Socialist era's collapse in eastern Europe, I jumped at it and have had the privilege of living and working in the region ever since.

Guy Mountfort's 'portrait' concerned the stretch of the Danube in Hungary and Bulgaria; this article looks further northeast, at the lowest reaches of the river, together with the delta proper, shared between Romania and Ukraine. While we can provide only a snapshot of such a huge and diverse area here, we hope that it will tempt and encourage readers to visit one of Europe's most remarkable natural areas – the closest we have to a subtropical zone – for themselves.

The lower Danube region is justly famous for its birds. On a warm May morning, drifting in a small fisherman's skiff along a winding, willow-lined channel or skirting a reed-fringed, lily-covered lake, the sights and sounds can be quite overwhelming. Small groups of Night Herons *Nycticorax nycticorax* constantly erupt from the trees and Pygmy Cormorants *Phalacrocorax pygmeus* dive by the banks, where Little Egrets *Egretta garzetta* quietly step through the shallow water; Golden Orioles *Oriolus oriolus* flute and chase through the canopy as the plaintive calls of Penduline Tits *Remiz pendulinus* sigh out where they build their hanging, gourd-like, pussy-willow nests. Over the open water, the myriads of Whiskered Terns *Chlidonias hybrida* raucously defend their nests, placed on the floating leaves of lilies, while shy Red-necked Grebes *Podiceps grisegena* glide, half-submerged, among the dry stems of last year's reeds. Parties of Ferruginous Ducks

*Aythya nyroca* patter to take-off, their wings whirring, Little Bitterns *Ixobrychus minutus* zip like pink-fledged arrows through the reeds, while Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* quarter to and fro over the marsh. High above, the first squadrons of White Pelicans *Pelecanus onocrotalus* are circling in the thermals before heading for their feeding grounds, perhaps mingled with an odd White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*, or even a Black Stork *C. nigra*, or two. And everywhere, the continuous chattering din of Great Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*, perched on reed stems that bend and wave as they sing – drowning the softer songs of reeling Savi's Warblers *Locustella luscinioides* or the occasional lilting Paddyfield Warbler *A. agricola*. The day gets hotter and shade is sought in the cooler riverine forest, home to Hobbies *Falco subbuteo*, Black Woodpeckers *Dryocopus martius*, Thrush Nightingales



**Fig. 1.** Important Bird Areas in the lower Danube region of Ukraine and Romania.



*Luscinia luscinia* and Icterine Warblers *Hippolais icterina*. In the evening, as the chorus of frogs pulsates to life, the steppe glows gold and deep green, providing a backdrop for the spectacular acrobatics of European Rollers *Coracias garrulus*, European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster* and Red-footed Falcons *F. vespertinus* hunting among the buzzing swarms of dragonflies.

Within the lower Danube region covered by this article (fig. 1), there are seven Important Bird Areas (IBAs) identified by BirdLife International (Heath & Evans 2000; table 1). Together, they cover more than 491,000 ha – about the size of Northumberland – but they are by no means the only sites in the region with high biodiversity value. Though only one of the IBAs is situated in Romania (the Romanian Danube delta and Razim–Sinoie lagoon complex), it actually comprises some 90% of the entire IBA area. The IBAs on the Ukrainian side, on the other hand, are more fragmented (mainly confined to places of bird concentration) and do not fully reflect their ecological context. This difference of approach by neighbouring countries to the designation of

IBAs in a single ecological region poses some problems for conservation management.

### The Danube river and lakes

The Danube is the largest European river west of the Volga and runs 2,780 km from its source in the Black Forest of Germany, 1,000 m above sea level, to the northwest coast of the Black Sea. The river basin covers 801,460 km<sup>2</sup> and 18 countries are counted as riparian states (ICPDR 2005). At its mouth, the Danube has an average discharge of about 6,460 m<sup>3</sup>/sec – equivalent to the volume of water held by two-and-a-half Olympic-sized swimming pools every second. This volume can double during the spring flood between April and May, when rain and melting snow from the central European mountain ranges swell the river and its tributaries (Sava, Tisza and Prut especially). In April 2006, the spring flood reached proportions not seen for more than a century; the flow-rate reached nearly 16,000 m<sup>3</sup>/sec, water levels rose by over 3 m in some places, and Romania deliberately flooded about 90,000 ha of farmland to reduce the impact on

**Table 1.** Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in the lower Danube region of Romania and Ukraine (Heath & Evans 2000; [www.birdlife.org/datazone/sites/](http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/sites/)). Figures in parentheses show the area (ha) of the site as a whole (after Goriup 2003). A key to the criteria used to determine IBA status is also given.

IBA Ref. No.	IBA Site name	Extent of IBA (ha)	Criteria used to determine IBA status
RO 001	Romanian Danube delta and Razim–Sinoie lagoon complex	442,000	A1, A4i, A4iii, B1i, B1iii, B2, B3
UA 080	Kagul lake	10,500	A1, A4iii, B2
UA 081	Kugurlui and Kartal lakes	19,200 (24,000)	A1, A4i, A4iii, B1i, B2
UA 082	River Danube at Kilia	2,500	A1, A4i, A4iii, B1i, B2
UA 083	Kitai lake	5,000 (5,900)	A1, A4i, A4iii, B1i
UA 084	Stentsovsko-Zhebrianski plavni	6,800	A1, A4i, A4iii, B1i, B2, B3
UA 088	Zmeiny Island	17	A1, A4i, B1i
A1	The site regularly holds significant numbers of a globally threatened species, or other species of global conservation concern.		
A4i	The site is known or thought to hold, on a regular basis, at least 1% of a biogeographic population of a congregatory waterbird species.		
A4iii	The site is known or thought to hold, on a regular basis, at least 1% of the global population of a congregatory seabird or terrestrial species.		
A4iii	The site is known or thought to hold, on a regular basis, c. 20,000 waterbirds or c. 10,000 pairs of seabirds of one or more species.		
B1i	The site is known or thought to hold at least 1% of a flyway or other distinct population of a waterbird species.		
B1iii	The site is known or thought to hold at least 1% of a flyway or other distinct population of other congregatory species.		
B2	The site is one of the most important in the country for a SPEC (Species of European Concern) 2 or 3 species, and for which the site-protection approach is thought to be appropriate.		
B3	The site is one of the most important in the country for a SPEC 4 species, and for which the site-protection approach is thought to be appropriate.		



David Tipling/Windrush

**84.** Depending on the weather conditions, almost the entire world population of Red-breasted Geese *Branta ruficollis* may winter in the Danube Delta. A few European White-fronted Geese *Anser albifrons albifrons* are mixed in among this flock and the Danube is also an important winter refuge for this species.

downstream settlements.

The Danube is certainly often beautiful but, *pace* Johann Strauss Jnr, rarely blue: its generally lowland drainage basin means that it carries a heavy sediment load that gives it a more brown-green colour. It is this sediment, tens of millions of tonnes of which are carried to the coast each year, that caused the formation of the largest delta in Europe.

Another important feature of the river is that more than 81 million people live in the basin. The effluent from waste water, farming and industry all drains eventually into the Danube and has caused enormous pollution problems, especially nutrient enrichment (eutrophication). The interplay of water flow, sediment and nutrients is a major driving force for ecological processes in the lower Danube and will be discussed more fully later.

Along the northern bank of the Danube, and Kilia (Kiliya) branch in Ukraine, range a series of five large floodplain waterbodies. Although commonly termed lakes, they are actually limans (river valleys flooded by the Danube) with one or more rivers flowing into them. Consequently, they have a characteristically conical or palm-like shape and are relatively shallow. These lakes are (from west to east) Kagul (Kahul), Kugurlui, Yalpug (Yalpuh), Katlabugh (Katlabukh) and Kitai (Kytay). With a

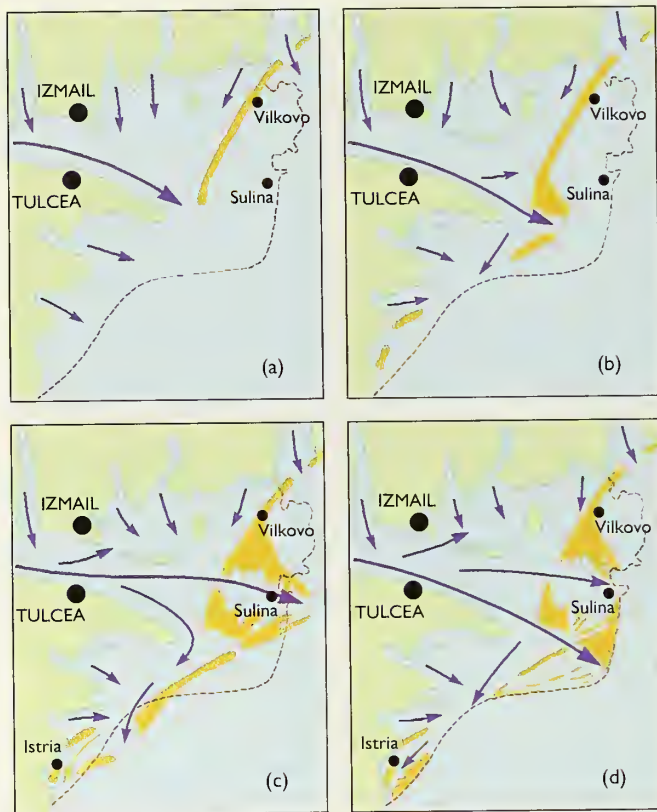
volume of 600 million m<sup>3</sup> and a surface area of 15,000 ha, Lake Yalpug is the largest natural freshwater body in Ukraine (in comparison, Cumbria's Lake Windermere has a volume of 315 million m<sup>3</sup> and covers just 1,480 ha).

### *Birth of a delta*

When the last Ice Age began to wane, about 15,000 years ago, the Black Sea was a vast freshwater lake. It was fed with meltwater from the Scandinavian-Russian ice cap by large rivers on its northern rim: the Danube, Dniester, Dniepr and Don. The transition of the freshwater lake to a marine environment during the late Neolithic period, when our ancestors would have been farming the area, was among the most dramatic environmental events in Europe. Some geologists describe the transformation in suitably Biblical terms: about 7,600 years ago, the Mediterranean, swollen by post-glacial sea-level rise, breached what is now the Bosphorus and within just two years raised the water level by some 80 m (Ryan & Pitman 1988). This spectacle could have laid the foundation of Noah's legendary flood.

The more prosaic truth, however, appears to be that the water level of the inland lake gradually rose about 100 m over some 12,000 years so that it eventually connected with the Mediterranean (Aksu *et al.* 2002). As the rivers backed up and





**Fig. 2.** Evolution of the Danube Delta (after Panin & Jipa 2002).

- (a) 12,000 BP: the Danube discharges into a 'gulf' and the formation of a spit begins along the northern coast.
- (b) 10,000 BP: the spit has progressed forming a 'beach' from Sasyk Liman south through Letea to Caraorman, about 25–30 km west of the present delta shoreline. The first part of the delta was formed at the mouth of the future Sfintu Gheorge branch.
- (c) 2,500 BP: as the southern course filled with sediment, a new channel was cut to the north – the Sulina branch. A delta forms here, building outwards some 10–15 km east of the present shoreline. Meanwhile, the Sfintu Gheorge delta regresses about 8 km and the Razim–Sinoie lagoon complex begins to take shape along a small branch, the Dunavets.
- (d) 500 BP to present: the sedimentation of the Sulina branch forced the main Danube course even further north, forming the Kilia branch. The Danube lakes gradually appear, and a new phase of delta building starts from Vilkovovo. The Kilia delta is now 16–18 km east of Vilkovovo, while the Sulina delta has regressed by about 10–12 km. The Razim–Sinoie lagoon complex closes, and the historic port town of Istria dies.

coastal valleys flooded, a chain of deltas, coastal lagoons and inland limans were eventually formed around the northern half of the shore, stretching from Bulgaria to Russia. Once the connection to the Mediterranean had been made, a counter-current of heavier, saline water began to flow in under the freshwater outflow, creating the brackish Black Sea (the salinity of the Black Sea is about half that of the Mediterranean).

Beginning from a gulf of the newly risen Black Sea about 12,000 years ago, the Danube delta itself was formed by the deposition of river sediments, accretion of marine sediments, wind and wave action, a counter-clockwise marine current that caused the formation of long spits, and not least by the influence of its rich variety of plants and animals (fig. 2). After the original gulf (the course of which is still marked by dunes supporting the remarkable Letea and Caraorman forests) was closed by coastal sand-bars, a new geomorphological phase began, with the backfilling of the bays and conversion to lagoons; then further infilling resulted in the creation of deltaic lakes, channels, levees and marshes (Panin & Jipa 2002). By about 500 years ago, the main part of the Danube delta had extended some 30 km into the sea and taken on much of its current form: a vast, flat, triangular terrain, bounded to the north by the primary Kilia branch, to the south by the mature Sfintu Gheorge (Sfântu Gheorghe) branch, and with a small central channel leading to the port of Sulina.

Two 'secondary deltas' were also created. The southern Razim–Sinoie lagoon complex (where sediment deposition led to the extinction of the ancient port of Istria), and northern Kilia lobe east of Vilkovovo. Today, the Kilia lobe is the most actively

growing part of the delta. When Vilkovovo was founded in 1775, it was actually situated on the shoreline, now it is 18 km inland.

### Birds and their habitats

From early May to mid June it takes little effort in the lower Danube region to see 90 species in a day, and within a few days, it is quite possible to see over 160 species. In fact, about 320



species have been recorded in the region as a whole, but its global importance lies more in the sheer numbers of birds – especially water-birds – with unfavourable conservation status in Europe that breed, migrate through or winter here (appendix 1). Of 93 species of European concern (SPEC) which occur in the region, no fewer than 12 are globally threatened or near-threatened species: Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus*, Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis*, Ferruginous Duck, Pygmy Cormorant, Dalmatian Pelican *P. crispus*, White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*, Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*, Eastern Imperial Eagle *A. heliaca*, Corn Crake *Crex crex*, Great Snipe *Gallinago media*, and Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*.

In 2002, the first co-ordinated census of colonially nesting birds in the whole region was undertaken (Platteeuw *et al.* 2004). A total of 209 colonies was found, holding almost 40,000 breeding pairs of 13 species. The populations of at least nine of these (White and Dalmatian Pelicans, Pygmy and Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo*, Little and Great White Egrets *Ardea alba*, Night Heron, Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* and Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*) are such that the lower Danube region harbours

more than 1% of their European populations. Moreover, for the four species of pelicans and cormorants, over 10% of their flyway populations occur here. Similarly, the lower Danube region supports some of the most important European breeding populations of Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*, Ferruginous Duck, Red-necked Grebe, Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* and Red-footed Falcon.

In winter, the region can host over a million waterbirds, although the actual numbers vary widely depending on the extent of ice and snow cover in the winter. Populations typically build up from late November and reach a peak from mid January to mid February; however, if the shallow lakes freeze and fields are covered with snow, many birds move farther south, to Bulgaria and Turkey. The region hosts significant wintering populations of, among others, Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*, White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*, Smew *Mergellus albellus* and, at times, almost the entire world population of Red-breasted Goose. A few Lesser White-fronted Geese usually hide themselves in the goose flocks. Winter also sees an influx of raptors, including large numbers of Common *Buteo buteo* and Rough-legged Buzzards *B. lagopus* that appear as sentinels on telegraph posts throughout the region, while White-tailed



Paul Gorup

85. This complex of coastal sand-bars and saline lagoons beside Lake Sinoie is a core area of the Biosphere Reserve in Romania. It is important for its breeding colonies of Collared Pratincoles *Glareola pratincola*, and forms a feeding place for White *Pelecanus onocrotalus* and Dalmatian Pelicans *P. crispus* and a roosting area for wintering Red-breasted Geese *Branta ruficollis*.

Sea Eagles haunt the nervous groups of ducks gathered on open water. Flocks of Fieldfares *Turdus pilaris* and Bramblings *Fringilla montifringilla* patrol the road verges and coveys of Grey Partridges *Perdix perdix* huddle in field corners. The coast supports a variety of ducks (Anatidae), divers (Gaviidae), grebes (Podicipedidae) and gulls (Laridae). Above all, there are Rooks *Corvus frugilegus*, which arrive in copious quantities from Russia, their population having swelled after the planting of windbreaks, which provide excellent nesting habitat; they swarm and comb the stubbles and roadsides so thoroughly that hardly anything can be left for other birds, and at dusk they stream to their roosts in endless black ribbons.

Bird migration in the lower Danube region is heaviest between mid April and early May, and again from late August to early October. At this time, especially in the spring, when the vegetation is still bare, a wide range of passerines and waders can be seen as they move to and from their more northern breeding grounds. Every small pool seems to be filled with Ruffs *Philomachus pugnax*, Little Stints *Calidris minuta*, Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola*, and Spotted Redshanks *T. erythropus*, while Red-throated Pipits *Anthus cervinus* run through the grass and Collared Flycatchers *Ficedula albicollis* flick among the bushes.

At this time, Zmeiny Island = the Fair Isle of the region – comes into its own. Lying 35 km out from the mouth of the Danube, it is a rocky

outcrop 60 m high, 17 ha in extent, and covered mainly with grass. Until 2004, it was a military garrison but has recently been turned over for research and conservation. The best times to visit are in May and October, when tens of thousands of birds migrate over it. Now that it is accessible, the list of unexpected birds recorded here is steadily growing, and includes Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius*, Alpine Swift *Apus melba*, Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*, Yellow-browed Warbler *Ph. inornatus*, Yellow-breasted *Emberiza aureola*, Black-headed *E. melanocephala* and Grey-necked Buntings *E. buchanani* (Fesenko & Bokotey 2002). This list is bound to grow!

Perhaps the most enigmatic of the region's migratory birds is the critically endangered Slender-billed Curlew. During the last few years, small groups of birds have been found in the northern coastal areas, frequenting low islands, bays and sand-spits covered with Common Glasswort *Salicornia europaea* (Zhud 2005). Four birds were present from 25th July to 21st August 2003, six were seen on 11th August 2004, and another on 12th August 2004.

All these riches of birds (not to mention over 40 species of mammals, seven reptiles, 11 amphibians, 97 fish, over 3,000 invertebrates and more than 1,600 plants) arise partly from the region's location at about 45°N, at the junction of the Mediterranean, Pontic and Eurasian sub-zones of the Palearctic faunal realm. It is also because of the continued existence of relatively



86. A group of White Pelicans *Pelecanus onocrotalus* feeding in the Kilia branch of the Danube river, Ukraine. Though all the breeding colonies are in the Romanian side of the delta, a large part of the favoured feeding and loafing areas are in the Ukrainian side.



large, connected and ecologically intact areas of many different habitat types, combined with generally low levels of human disturbance. The chief natural habitat types are the main river channel and its branches, river islands, lakes, limans, marshes, steppes and meadows, broadleaf forests, salt-flats, lagoons, dune systems, and the fore-shore. However, the region is also intensively farmed (mainly cereals, sunflowers and legumes, with some areas of rice paddy), forestry (poplar *Populus* hybrids, false acacia *Robinia* spp. and conifers) and fish production (in natural water-bodies as well as artificial ponds).

The Danube delta proper covers a total area of 415,200 ha, shared between Romania (82%) and Ukraine (18%). The delta coastline is almost 240 km long, of which about 75 km lies in Ukraine; the 165 km in Romania (all of it protected) represents almost two-thirds of the country's entire coastline. The Razim-Sinoie lagoon complex is situated to the south of the delta. Formerly brackish, the lagoons have become fresh following the closure of the link to the sea. The Danube floodplain marshes and limans west of Izmail extend to another 52,800 ha or so.

About 70% of the vegetation of the delta zone is dominated by Common Reed *Phragmites australis*, which covers over 170,000 ha and forms the largest belt of reedbed in the world. Marshes of emergent aquatic plants are also formed by reedmace and sedge, chiefly Lesser Bulrush *Typha angustifolia* and Tufted-sedge *Carex elata*. Sometimes chunks of vegetation

around lake edges break away during storms, creating floating islands ('plaurs'), which are favoured by nesting birds, especially pelicans, because of their inaccessibility to predators.

In freshwater lakes, canals and secondary streams, a wide range of aquatic plants form submerged beds and floating mats with high productivity of insects, fish and frogs that sustain the ducks, grebes, herons (Ardeidae) and terns (Sternidae). The dominant plants are White Water-lily *Nymphaea alba*, Yellow Water-lily *Nuphar lutea*, Water Chestnut *Trapa natans*, Fennel Pondweed *Potamogeton pectinatus*, Spiked Water-milfoil *Myriophyllum spicatum*, Rigid Hornwort *Ceratophyllum demersum*, Water-soldier *Stratiotes aloides* and various charophytes (stoneworts).

White Willow *Salix alba*, Crack-willow *S. fragilis*, and Almond Willow *S. triandra* form forests on the higher river levees, while Grey Willow *S. cinerea* is found as a pioneer species on lower ones. Willow stands are favoured by colonially breeding species (herons, cormorants and ibises) as they occur close to wetland feeding areas. The ancient Letea and Caraculman dune systems (covering some 22,700 ha) mark the pre-deltaic shoreline. Today, they support curvilinear bands of forest along the damp slacks comprising Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur*, Stalk-fruit Oak *Q. pedunculiflora*, Narrow-leaved Ash *Fraxinus angustifolia* and Pallis' Ash *F. pallisiae*, various shrubs and the climbing Wild Vine *Vitis sil-*



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87. This huge sluice, built in the early 1980s, controls the flow of water from the Danube (foreground) through a channel to Sasyk Liman, Ukraine, 18 km to the northeast. The purpose was to convert the brackish liman to a freshwater lake, and then abstract the water for irrigation. The channel bisected the reedbeds of Stentsovsko-Zhebrianski plovni, altering hydrological conditions and precipitating changes that resulted in the loss of a major Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* colony. The irrigation scheme itself was a failure.



*vestris* and Silk Vine *Periploca graeca*. Birds of prey (White-tailed Eagle, Hobby and sometimes Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes*) breed in the forests, along with Thrush Nightingales, woodpeckers and warblers.

On the open dunes there are arenaceous plant associations characterised by grasses such as Pyramidal Hair-grass *Koeleria pyramidata*, Blue Hair-grass *K. glauca* and Pale Fescue *Festuca pallens*. Steppe areas were once found on all drier areas but are now confined to lake-side banks, road verges and rocky slopes where the plough cannot go; they still have an extremely rich complement of flowering plants and grasses, including the feather-grasses *Stipa* spp. that characterise them. In areas with saline soils, associations of halophilous plants are frequently found; these include species such as Common Glasswort, Annual Sea-blite *Suaeda maritima*, Reflexed Saltmarsh-grass *Puccinellia distans*, Mediterranean Salt-grass *Aeluropus litoralis*, and Gmelini's Sea-lavender *Limonium gmelini*. These areas are favoured by species such as Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*, European Roller, Hoopoe *Upupa epops* and Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*.

The region has a continental-temperate climate, ameliorated by the proximity of the Black Sea (table 2). The winter is short and mild, with a variable frost period, while the summer is long and hot. Breezes from the Black

**Table 2.** Climatic characteristics of the lower Danube region.

Temperature	
Annual average	11.0°C
Mean monthly minimum (January)	-1.5°C
Mean monthly maximum (July)	22.7°C
Absolute minimum recorded	-27.2°C (18th January 1963)
Absolute maximum recorded	39.7°C (2nd August 1945)
Precipitation	
Mean annual precipitation (west)	400–500 mm
Mean annual precipitation (east)	300–350 mm

Sea disperse clouds and reduce precipitation. Thus, while the annual precipitation in the lower Danube region is generally within the 300–500-mm range, evaporation exceeds 800 mm, which means that the region lies in a drought-prone area, typical of the eastern part of the Danube basin (or Pannonic region). On average, only 65–85 days of rainfall occur annually, with some 65–70% of the total annual precipitation falling in the summer (mainly June) during heavy rainstorms that cause extensive soil erosion.



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**88.** The area of flood meadows, reedbeds and lakes between Tulcea and Isaccea in Romania is one of the last surviving examples of such habitat in the Danube Delta as a whole. Almost all of the lower Danube floodplain, in both Romania and Ukraine, has been drained for agriculture during the last 50 years. Active floodplains ameliorate flood peaks and recycle nutrients – and there are now plans to restore some floodplain areas after recent flood and pollution events.

### Conservation issues and management

In common with most parts of Europe, the lower Danube region has been heavily affected by human activities. In the delta, work began in 1858 on the Sulina Channel (helped by British engineers) to increase access for shipping. The first flood-protection dykes, intended to promote agriculture, were built between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. However, most damage was done after the Second World War. Direct loss and impairment of the natural river and delta ecosystem occurred from the early 1950s to late 1980s through construction of border and flood defences that isolated the floodplains and limans from the Danube. Subsequently, there was land reclamation and polderisation for agriculture and forestry, channel building and dredging to improve access and redirect sediment flows to the coast, construction of fishponds, and discharge of industrial and urban pollution from the cities of Galati, Tulcea and Izmail. Altogether, about one-third to half of the area was converted out of natural habitat by the time the Socialist era collapsed between 1989 and 1991.

Unfortunately, most of the rest of the natural area remains under considerable indirect stress as a result of human activities upstream, which affect the sediment transport that is the body of the delta, and the quality of its water that is its lifeblood. Between 1921 and 1960, the amount of alluvia carried by the Danube to the head of the delta averaged about 67.5 million tonnes/year. After the construction



David Tipling/Windrush

89. The lower Danube supports some of the most important European breeding populations of several waterfowl, including Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*.



David Tipling/Windrush

90. Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*, one of 12 globally threatened or near-threatened species which occur in the Danube Delta. This small and distinctive cormorant is resident in the region, nesting colonially, typically in low stands of willow *Salix*.

of many dams along the most important Danube tributaries between 1969 and 1989, and especially the Iron Gates dams on the Serbian/Romanian border to provide hydro-electric power generation, the average annual suspended sediment load decreased significantly, to only 29.2 million tonnes/year today. As a result, active delta formation now proceeds only along the Kilia branch (which has the



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**91.** Riverine forest with stands of old-growth poplars *Populus* and willows *Salix* in Ukraine. This habitat is now a rare sight in the Danube Delta; most of the original forest on the Danube levee has been replanted with commercial hybrids (especially in Romania). This habitat is favoured by Black Woodpeckers *Dryocopus martius*, Thrush Nightingales *Luscinia luscinia* and Icterine Warblers *Hippolais icterina*.

Günter Bachmeier



**92.** The impressive Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* is a fairly common resident in the Danube Delta, favouring areas with stands of old, large poplars *Populus*.

highest discharge and consequently the highest sediment load) in Ukraine; elsewhere much of the coast is actually eroding. Moreover, isolated deltaic lakes (such as Sireasa, Furtuna, Gorgova,

Uzlina and Rosu) were connected by artificial canals during the last 30–35 years to provide access for fishing as stocks in the Danube itself declined. These canals siphoned off sediment from the main channels, reducing even more the amount reaching the coast, and silting up the lakes themselves (Baboianu & Goriup 1995). Because there are now fewer new islands and sand-bars, the area available for colonies of gulls and terns has declined greatly.

Meanwhile, the previous connection of the Ukrainian limans to the River Danube was broken by a flood embankment so that today they are filled and drained using a system of sluices and canals. In effect, they became little more than reservoirs used to store water for irrigation and fish production. But, being closed, shallow and surrounded by agriculture, they also accumulated sediment and nutrient run-off, causing them to become eutrophic. Today, the water quality is so poor that it cannot be used for irrigation and the fishery has collapsed.

In 2000, some 760,000 tonnes of nitrogen and 73,000 tonnes of phosphorus were flushed into the Danube river basin (ICPDR 2005), mostly from urban waste water and fertiliser run-off. These levels are about twice those of the 1950s, though rather less than that discharged during the 1990s, partly as a result of emission control measures. In fact, the economic crisis in former Communist countries resulted in a steep decline in the production and application of mineral fertilisers and the closure of large animal farms. Nevertheless, the damage has been and still continues to be done. All the Ukrainian limans and most of the main lakes in the delta are now moderately to highly eutrophic, resulting in important changes in the structure of their flora and fauna. The composition of



fish communities has been particularly heavily affected, with knock-on effects in the whole ecosystem and, indeed, the local economy.

Pollution from pesticides and heavy metals is mercifully low, though illegal use of some banned substances continues and levels of cadmium and lead are worryingly high in certain areas. The main concern here is accidental massive pollution from the failure of storage dumps and landfills for agricultural, urban, industrial and mining wastes that are liberally spread through the basin. The most important of these 'hotspots' have been identified under the Danube Pollution Reduction Programme (see [www.icpdr.org/undp-drp](http://www.icpdr.org/undp-drp)) and are monitored, but the costs of cleaning up such pollution incidents are massive.

Two other forms of ecological stress are perhaps even less tractable than chemical pollution and physical infrastructure, since they are essentially biological: the spread of invasive alien species and the related issue of fisheries. Because of the large scale of works on the original European river system, there now exists a complicated network of interconnected shipping canals that not only link the North, Baltic, Mediterranean and Black Seas (and indeed the Caspian Sea), but also facilitate the introduction of alien species carried in ballast water or attached to hulls. For example, the Zebra Mussel *Dreissena polymorpha* arrived in the Danube system in the 1980s from the Caspian and has spread widely, often forming dense beds that crowd out native mollusc species. Aquatic and bank vegetation is suffering widespread invasion by as many as 15 nuisance species that suppress local communities and alter the natural habitats. These include



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93. The slopes of Lake Yalpug, Ukraine, feature many areas of native steppe (with two large areas in nature reserves), which support several hundred plant species. Colonies of Spotted Souslik *Spermophilus suslicus* can be found here, as well as colonies of European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster* and breeding European Rollers *Coracias garrulus*, Pied Wheatears *Oenanthe pleschanka* and Eastern Olivaceous Warblers *Hippolais pallida*.



Günter Bachmeier

94. European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*.

Indigo Shrub *Amorpha fruticosa*, Canadian Pondweed *Elodea canadensis*, Himalayan Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera*, and Canada Goldenrod *Solidago canadensis*. In addition, in floodplain forests there are problems with tree species such as Ash-leaved Maple *Acer negundo*, Tree of Heaven *Ailanthus altissima* and Red Ash *Fraxinus pennsylvanica* that invade clear-felled areas.

Recent research on restoring eutrophic lakes in the Norfolk Broads (Moss *et al.* 1996) and elsewhere has shown that the role played by certain fish in maintaining the state of aquatic

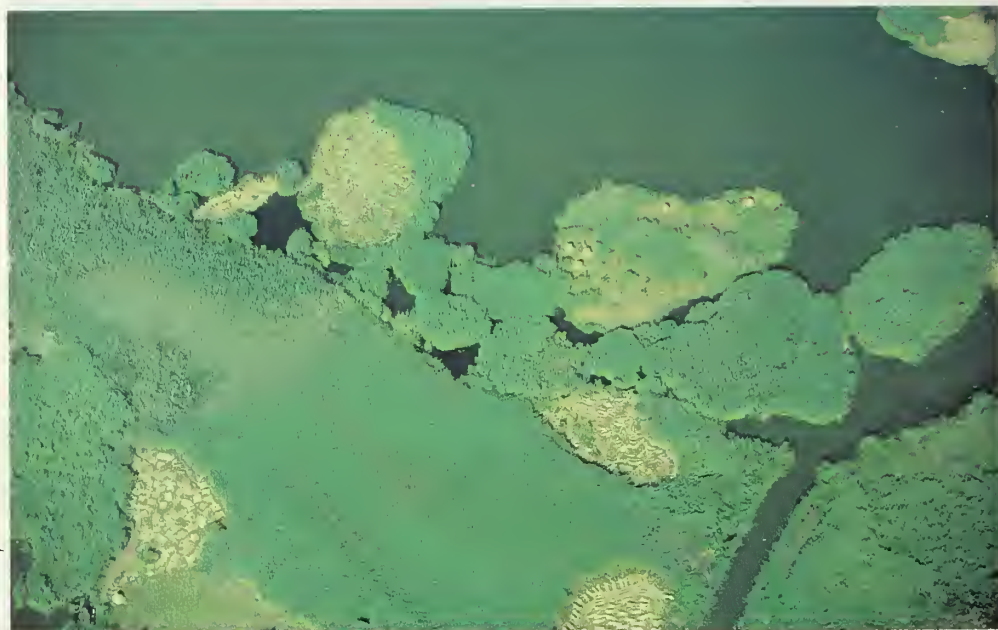
ecosystems is so significant that their species composition is now used to define water quality. The story of the collapse of the native fisheries in the lower Danube by misguided management and rank overfishing, and their replacement by exotic, farmed species that have since escaped into the channels and lakes (see Baboianu & Goriup 1993, Goriup 2003), is beyond the scope of this article. To call it an ecological catastrophe is not an understatement – and of course the food supply for fish-eating birds has diminished in parallel.

Even today, new serious threats arise. In 2004, the construction of a deep-water navigable channel through the Bistroye branch in the centre of the Ukrainian Kilia delta nature reserve began and will cause major ecological damage if it is completed. Furthermore, it has already set a precedent that no protected area in the country is safe from economic 'improvement'. The works have caused an international outcry from the European Union, Ramsar Convention, Commission for the Protection of the Danube River and UNESCO, among others (but, curiously, not from the Black Sea Protection Convention, where Ukraine has a powerful influence). The Ukrainian Government (which changed in December 2005 after a famous 'Orange Revolution') has promised a full environmental review before commencing the

second phase of construction, and a UNESCO-sponsored international conference held in Odessa in February 2006 charted a course for a more sustainable future for development in the delta. However, the new government saw fit to ignore all these issues and, in November 2006, work on the channel resumed.

The consequence of all these pressures on the lower Danube avifauna has been an extraordinary twenty-fold reduction of waterbird numbers. It seems barely credible that, when so many birds still inhabit the region and delight the visitor, barely a century ago there were over six million waterbirds breeding there (Dragomir & Staras 1992) compared with about 300,000 today. It must have been an amazing spectacle – can it ever be even partially recovered?

Since 1990, the protected-area system in the region has been transformed. The whole of the Romanian area of the delta and much of the Ukrainian part have been designated as Biosphere Reserves. In 1999, they were recognised as a transboundary reserve by UNESCO and 60% of the Romanian area has been listed as a natural World Heritage Site. Parts of Lakes Kugurlui and Kartal are listed as wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar



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**95.** Harvested reeds and reed islands, known as 'plauri' inside the Danube Delta, Romania. Plauri are often important breeding sites for waterbirds (pelicans in particular), since they provide protection from predators. In this case, the plauri have broken from the edges of the lake and been blown across to accumulate near the mouth of a channel.





David Tipling/Windrush

96. Dalmatian Pelicans *Pelecanus crispus*, another signal species of the Danube, and another species of global conservation concern. There is a breeding population in the delta of around 1,100 birds and a few overwinter if conditions allow.

Convention, and several other areas are protected under domestic legislation as nature reserves or landscape parks. An intergovernmental agreement on the restoration of a 'lower Danube Green Corridor' was agreed between Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania and Ukraine in 2000, and a plan for joint management of the protected areas in the lower Danube (including the Lower Prut Scientific Reserve in Moldova) has been prepared (Baboianu *et al.* 2005). The Danube Delta Research Institute in Tulcea, which has designed the water management and polder works in the past, is now firmly focused on biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. Consequently, during the last decade more than 10,000 ha of agricultural polders and fishponds have been returned to wetlands and pastures. In the Romanian zone, 13 canals were cut off or partially blocked in order to re-establish the natural flow regime and reduce nutrient inputs.

Much remains to be done. On the Ukrainian side, the Biosphere Reserve should be extended to include the limans (creating an equivalent

area to that on the Romanian side), and their water management regime adjusted to a more ecologically balanced cycle; fishing practices changed to focus on sustainable production of higher-value native species and sport angling; incentives for organic farming established; and low-intensity tourism with associated services (such as accommodation, catering and guiding) encouraged. With the accession to the EU of many upstream riparian states (Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in January 2007), there will be enforceable legal obligations and financial inducements to reduce levels of organic pollution (not much of this pollution comes from Ukraine itself) and, over time, conditions will become favourable for restoring the ecological status of many lakes.

In short, during the past 50 years, the birds of the lower Danube region have probably suffered their worst period since they colonised the original delta some 2,000 years ago. Yet, the area remains of outstanding ornithological importance on a global scale, and perhaps the next 50 years will see some of its former glory regained.



### Visiting the lower Danube region

A number of nature-tour companies offer organised trips to the region, covering both Romania and Ukraine. The best times to visit are from early May to mid June, from mid August to late September, and in early February, but there is much to see at any time of the year. A visa is not required by EU citizens to visit either country, English is fairly widely spoken in the main towns (and by school teachers in the villages), and it is possible to explore the areas privately by hired car and boat – but given their large size, permit requirements and sporadic accommodation facilities, it is advisable to contact local guides for assistance (for Romania visit [www.ddbra.ro/ENG/Tour/UConstr.html](http://www.ddbra.ro/ENG/Tour/UConstr.html) and for Ukraine visit [www.salix.od.ua](http://www.salix.od.ua)). Access to Zmeiny Island can be arranged through Salix Nature Tours. Visitor centres run by the Romanian and Ukrainian Biosphere Reserve authorities are situated in Tulcea and Vilkovo respectively. The birds can be seen from the approved tour routes or public roads and paths, and there is no need whatsoever to cause problems by leaving them.

### Recommended further reading and web links

An excellent series of reports on the ecology and birds of the Danube Delta can be downloaded from [www.rijkswaterstaat.nl/rws/riza/home/publicaties/index.html](http://www.rijkswaterstaat.nl/rws/riza/home/publicaties/index.html) See also Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Administration ([www.ddbra.ro](http://www.ddbra.ro)), Danube River Protection Commission ([www.icpdr.org](http://www.icpdr.org)) and Danube Environment Forum ([www.daphne.sk/daphne\\_def.htm](http://www.daphne.sk/daphne_def.htm)).



**97.** Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* is a summer visitor to the region. The population of at least 7,000 birds breeds in just 12 large colonies.

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## Appendix 1. Characteristic and/or significant birds of the lower Danube and Danube Delta IBAs in Romania (RO) and Ukraine (UA).

### Notes

a. SPEC categories are as follows:

- 1 Species of global conservation concern, i.e. classified as Threatened, Near Threatened or Data Deficient under the IUCN Red List Criteria at global level (see [www.redlist.org](http://www.redlist.org))
- 2 Species concentrated in Europe and with an Unfavourable Conservation Status in Europe.
- 3 Species not concentrated in Europe but with an Unfavourable Conservation Status in Europe.
- <sup>F</sup> Species concentrated in Europe but with a Favourable Conservation Status in Europe.

b. Sources: Heath & Evans (2000); Platteeuw *et al.* (2004), and pers. obs.

c. Visibility refers to the likelihood of seeing a species in May or February during a visit of three days under average weather conditions; H = high, G = good, P = poor and U = unlikely.

	SPEC code <sup>a</sup>	Status <sup>b</sup>	Visibility <sup>c</sup> May Feb.	
Lesser White-fronted Goose <i>Anser erythropus</i>	1	Winter visitor in very small numbers. Difficult to find among the huge flocks of White-fronted Geese <i>A. albifrons</i> that occur in winter.	—	U
Red-breasted Goose <i>Branta ruficollis</i>	1	Winter visitor in numbers from 20,000 upwards. However, distribution depends on extent of ice and snow cover.	—	G
Ruddy Shelduck <i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	3	Summer visitor (non-breeding in RO).	P	—
Gadwall <i>Anas strepera</i>	3	Resident (at least 4,000 birds), nesting on lakes and moving to the coast during winter.	H	P
Red-crested Pochard <i>Netta rufina</i>	—	Resident (at least 400 birds), nesting on lakes and moving to the coast during winter.	H	P
Ferruginous Duck <i>Aythya nyroca</i>	1	Summer visitor and breeds (at least 3,500 birds).	H	—
White-headed Duck <i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>	1	Rare winter visitor (RO).	—	U
Red-necked Grebe <i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	—	Resident (at least 2,200 birds). Nests in small lakes and winters in coastal bays.	H	—
Pygmy Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax pygmeus</i>	1	Resident (at least 23,000 birds). Breeds in colonies with other species, selecting nest-sites in stands of low willow <i>Salix</i> . Disperses around the region for the winter.	H	P
White Pelican <i>Pelecanus anacoratalus</i>	3	Summer visitor, with a population of at least 10,000 birds. Nests in colonies, predominantly at Lake Hrecisca (RO). Gathers in large pre-migration flocks, for example at Lake Kartal (UA).	H	—



	SPEC code <sup>a</sup>	Status <sup>b</sup>	Visibility <sup>c</sup>	
			May	Feb.
Dalmatian Pelican <i>Pelecanus crispus</i>	1	Mainly summer visitor (about 1,100 birds) but a few overwinter if waterbodies stay ice-free. Nests in one colony at Lake Lejai (RO).	G	U
Eurasian Bittern <i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	3	Resident (at least 1,500 birds) breeding in reedbeds widely across the region.	P	U
Little Bittern <i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	3	Summer visitor (at least 6,000 birds) breeding in reedbeds widely across the region.	H	—
Night Heron <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	3	Summer visitor (at least 7,000 birds). Nests in about 30 fairly large colonies (one with over 500 pairs), usually in willows along inland watercourses near to lakes.	H	U
Squacco Heron <i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	3	Summer visitor (at least 1,500 birds). Breeds in 13 colonies, mixed with other herons and Glossy Ibis, in the central riverine part of the delta or at Stentsovsko-Zhebrianski plavni. (UA).	H	—
Cattle Egret <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	—	Summer visitor in the Romanian part, first recorded breeding in 1996. A small colony of 3–10 pairs has been established at Lake Nebunu (RO).	P	—
Great White Egret <i>Ardea alba</i>	—	Resident (at least 1,300 birds) and winter visitor. Some 27 breeding colonies situated around the edge of large areas of open water and close to farmland, with up to 100 pairs at one site.	H	H
Purple Heron <i>Ardea purpurea</i>	3	Summer visitor (at least 1,100 birds). Breeds in colonies in inundated reedbeds, mostly with fewer than 10 pairs each, but up to 50 pairs at one site.	H	—
Black Stork <i>Ciconia nigra</i>	2	Passage migrant, mainly in September when occasional flocks of up to 20 birds may drift along the river and down the coast.	P	—
White Stork <i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	2	Summer visitor (at least 300 birds). Nests on pylons in villages and along roads. Large flocks of hundreds of birds occur on migration from August to mid October.	H	—
Glossy Ibis <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	3	Summer visitor (at least 7,000 birds). Breeds in just 12 large, dense colonies, the largest of which holds c. 650 pairs, situated in low stands of willow, in the central part of the delta and at Lake Kugurlui (UA).	H	—

Paul Goriup



98. This shows the interior lake of Tataru Island, situated in the main Danube channel near Izmail, Ukraine. River islands have a characteristic spindle shape and a 'doughnut' topography of a perimeter levee (usually forested) and a permanent lake in the centre. The water here is normally very clear, allowing a proliferation of water plants. Marsh terns *Chlidonias* nest on the lily pads, often with Red-necked *Podiceps grisegena* and Black-necked Grebes *P. nigricollis*. A pair of White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicollis* nests in the forest.

	SPEC code <sup>a</sup>	Status <sup>b</sup>	Visibility <sup>c</sup>	
			May	Feb.
Eurasian Spoonbill <i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	2	Summer visitor (at least 700 birds). Nests in nine scattered colonies situated in trees inside reedbeds, mixed with other herons. The largest, at Lake Sinoie, holds 70–80 pairs.	H	—
Black Kite <i>Milvus migrans</i>	2	Resident (at least eight pairs) in Romanian part.	P	U
White-tailed Eagle <i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	1	Resident (at least 20 pairs) and winter visitor. Nests on tall trees in thick forest, often on river islands.	G	G
Hen Harrier <i>Circus cyaneus</i>	3	Fairly common winter visitor.	—	G
Pallid Harrier <i>Circus macrourus</i>	1	Passage migrant (seen mainly in autumn) in small numbers.	U	—
Montagu's Harrier <i>Circus pygargus</i>	— <sup>E</sup>	Summer visitor in small numbers. Nests in farmland.	P	—
Levant Sparrowhawk <i>Accipiter brevipes</i>	2	Summer visitor in small numbers. Nests in woodland.	U	—
Lesser Spotted Eagle <i>Aquila pomarina</i>	2	Passage migrant (seen mainly in autumn) in small numbers.	P	—
Booted Eagle <i>Aquila pennata</i>	3	Summer visitor in small numbers. Nests in forested areas.	P	—
Red-footed Falcon <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	3	Summer visitor (at least 1,000 birds). Nests in colonies, especially in rookeries, in farmland windbreaks. Passage flocks of hundreds of birds occur in autumn.	H	—
Little Crake <i>Porzana parva</i>	— <sup>E</sup>	Summer visitor, breeds, but status uncertain.	G	—
Collared Pratincole <i>Glareola pratincola</i>	3	Summer visitor (at least 250 birds). Nests on saline flats near Istria at Lake Sinoie (RO) and Premorsky coast (UA).	G	—
Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	3	Summer visitor (at least 100–200 birds). Nests on saline flats around the coast.	H	—
White-tailed Lapwing <i>Vanellus leucurus</i>	—	Sporadic summer visitor that bred for the first time in the Danube Delta in 2000. About 50 individuals were found in total, at four sites (Vadu, Istria, Sfintu Gheorge and Sulina, all Romania), and breeding was confirmed at Vadu; there were at least eight individuals and six nests there in May 2001. However, the colony seems to have suffered disturbance (not least from birders) and none has been observed since 2002.	U	—



David Tipling/Windrush

99. At least 20 pairs of White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicollis* are resident in the Danube Delta, while the population is swelled by additional wintering birds.

	SPEC code <sup>a</sup>	Status <sup>b</sup>	Visibility <sup>c</sup>	
			May	Feb.
Temminck's Stint <i>Calidris temminckii</i>	—	Passage migrant in small numbers, usually seen on coastal limans.	P	—
Slender-billed Curlew <i>Numenius tenuirostris</i>	1	Very rare passage migrant but with regular occurrence in small parties (1–4 birds), mainly during August, in areas of damp saltwort <i>Salsola kali</i> marsh in the northern part of the region.	—	—
Marsh Sandpiper <i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	—	Passage migrant, possible breeding in RO.	P	—
Wood Sandpiper <i>Tringa glareola</i>	3	Fairly common passage migrant.	G	—
Terek Sandpiper <i>Xenus cinereus</i>	—	Rare passage migrant.	U	—
Great Black-headed Gull <i>Larus ichthyaeus</i>	—	Winter visitor along the coast in small numbers, some staying till late spring; recent westward range expansion to Sivash in late 1990s may lead to new colonies being established in the region.	G	U
Mediterranean Gull <i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	— <sup>E</sup>	Resident, with one breeding colony at Murighiol (RO) of some 200 birds. Winters along the coast.	G	P
Little Gull <i>Larus minutus</i>	3	Passage migrant in big flocks, both along the coast and on inland open waters. Formerly bred in the delta.	P	P
Slender-billed Gull <i>Larus genei</i>	3	Uncommon spring visitor along the coast.	G	G
Gull-billed Tern <i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	3	Uncommon resident (about ten breeding birds in UA), occurring mainly along the river and coast.	H	P
Caspian Tern <i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	3	Passage migrant in small flocks and non-breeding summer visitor.	H	—
Whiskered Tern <i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	3	Summer visitor (at least 8,000 birds). Nests on lily-covered inland lakes.	H	—
Black Tern <i>Chlidonias niger</i>	3	Summer visitor. Nests on lily-covered inland lakes.	H	—
White-winged Black Tern <i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	—	Passage migrant, with some birds nesting on lily-covered inland lakes.	G	—
Grey-headed Woodpecker <i>Picus canus</i>	3	Scarce resident, found in secluded riverine woodlands.	G	U
Black Woodpecker <i>Dryocopus martius</i>	—	Fairly common resident, found in areas with stands of old, large poplars <i>Populus</i> .	G	G
Syrian Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>	— <sup>E</sup>	Common resident occurring throughout the region in gardens, parks and field-side windbreaks.	H	H
Calandra Lark <i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>	3	Common resident found locally in undulating arable areas. Winters in big flocks.	G	G
Short-toed Lark <i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	3	Summer visitor thinly distributed in the steppe zone and coastal saltmarsh.	G	—
Tawny Pipit <i>Anthus campestris</i>	3	Summer visitor thinly distributed in the steppe zone, farmland and coastal saltmarsh.	H	—
Thrush Nightingale <i>Luscinia luscinia</i>	— <sup>E</sup>	Common summer visitor breeding in thick shrubby areas near watercourses.	H	—
Pied Wheatear <i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i>	—	Uncommon summer visitor nesting in rocky areas, large old buildings (forts, monasteries) and sometimes village gardens.	G	—
Savi's Warbler <i>Locustella luscinioides</i>	— <sup>E</sup>	Common summer visitor breeding in large patches of reedbeds throughout the region.	G	—
Paddyfield Warbler <i>Acrocephalus agricola</i>	—	Summer visitor thinly distributed across the region, using both inland and coastal reedbed fringes.	H	—
Marsh Warbler <i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>	— <sup>E</sup>	Summer visitor, thinly distributed across the region, sometimes occurring in colonies where suitable shrubby and emergent vegetation is present.	G	—
Great Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	—	Abundant summer visitor breeding in almost all patches of reedbeds throughout the region.	H	—



# The Danube Delta: Europe's remarkable wetland

	SPEC code <sup>a</sup>	Status <sup>b</sup>	Visibility <sup>c</sup>	
			May	Feb.
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler <i>Hippolais pallida</i>	3	Uncommon summer visitor, found in dry woodlands and scrub.	G	—
Icterine Warbler <i>Hippolais icterina</i>	— <sup>E</sup>	Common summer visitor found mainly in riverine forest.	G	—
Barred Warbler <i>Sylvia nisoria</i>	— <sup>E</sup>	Summer visitor, breeding.	G	—
Red-breasted Flycatcher <i>Ficedula parva</i>	—	Summer visitor. Passage migrant in small numbers.	P	—
Collared Flycatcher <i>Ficedula albicollis</i>	— <sup>E</sup>	Passage migrant, seen mainly in April. Occurs in wooded and scrubby areas, windbreaks, parks and gardens.	P	—
Sombre Tit <i>Poecile lugubris</i>	— <sup>E</sup>	Local resident in broadleaf woodlands in Romania.	P	P
Penduline Tit <i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	—	Locally common summer visitor throughout the region, nesting in willows <i>Salix</i> bordering marshes and canals.	H	—
Red-backed Shrike <i>Lanius collurio</i>	3	Common summer visitor in shrubby areas throughout the region.	H	—
Lesser Grey Shrike <i>Lanius minor</i>	2	Summer visitor, thinly distributed in steppe and arable zones, often perching on overhead cables.	H	—
Woodchat Shrike <i>Lanius senator</i>	2	Rare summer visitor; a few breeding in the Romanian part.	P	—
Rose-coloured Starling <i>Sturnus roseus</i>	—	Spring visitor in variable numbers, but usually scarce; sometimes breeding.	G	—
Spanish Sparrow <i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	—	Summer visitor, usually forming colonies in stork nests; locally common and range expanding in UA.	H	—
Tree Sparrow <i>Passer montanus</i>	3	Common resident in steppe and arable areas, but also in gardens and parks.	H	H
Ortolan Bunting <i>Emberiza hortulana</i>	2	Scarce summer visitor found in scrub and copses in the steppe and arable zone.	G	—



Paul Goriup

**100.** Ice floes on the Danube at Tulcea, Romania, in February 2006. Hard winters occur from time to time such that the lakes, parts of the river and even the offshore sea waters freeze. Under these conditions, the large flocks of wintering wildfowl tend to move further south, to Bulgaria and Turkey. However, Common Buteo buteo, 'Steppe' B. b. vulpinus and Rough-legged Buzzards B. lagopus, Hen Harriers Circus cyaneus and White-tailed Eagles Haliaeetus albicollis make easy pickings from the Mallards Anas platyrhynchos and Common Coots Fulica atra left behind on a few patches of open water.

# One hundred years of notable avian events in *British Birds*

Andy Brown

**ABSTRACT** There can be few people with a passion for birds who have not been enthralled by, or envious of others who have witnessed, one or more of the spectacular events to have involved birds in Britain & Ireland. Unsurprisingly, the various editors of *British Birds* have made a considerable effort to ensure that this journal has been in the vanguard of reporting and documenting these events.

This article is intended as a guide to *British Birds*' reporting of the principal events involving birds in Britain & Ireland over its 100-year history. While opinion will vary as to what constitutes an 'event', I have tended to regard colonisations, extinctions and phenomena which suddenly affect birds over a wide area or in more than usual numbers – and preferably both – as events. Those included are a personal selection from the many, often graphic accounts of widespread death and destruction, of the displacement of birds on spectacular scales and of some quite abrupt changes in the status of our wild birds which have graced the pages of *BB*. They are presented by six main themes: the effects of severe weather; falls, rushes and hold-ups; the appearance of large numbers of typically scarce species; irruptions; colonisations and extinctions; and the human impact. The original papers contain a wealth of detailed data and other information; they also often contain much evocative prose and among them are some of the most exciting papers in the annals of British ornithological writing. Together, they thoroughly document an action-filled, eventful and memorable 100 years.

## *A brief history of reporting avian events in British Birds*

The editorial of the first issue of *British Birds* was used by the journal's editors for 'setting forth our plans, our hopes, and our ambitions

for BRITISH BIRDS'. They wrote that 'It shall be one of our chief aims, but not by any means our only aim, to provide in these pages, month by month, a current history of British birds... Our plan is to make organised enquiries into such questions as the extension or diminution of the breeding range of certain species, the exact status and distribution of some birds, the effects of protection in certain areas and on different species, the nature of the food of particular birds, and many kindred subjects.' Although it made no explicit reference to any intent to report on events in the avian world, such reports quickly occupied the journal's pages. Indeed, in the very first issue, in June 1907, an article by Gurney (1907) gave a strong indication that the reporting of significant events would become a central theme of the journal. Gurney reported that 'a violent storm of snow and hail... accompanied for at least twenty minutes by incessant flashes of lightning... caused a stampede among the horde of Pink-footed Geese [*Anser brachyrhynchus*], estimated at nearly four thousand, which usually make the preserved salt-marshes of Holkham and Wells their head-quarters. These birds, probably terrified by the noise of the thunder and half-blinded by the snow, flew about in all directions, exposing themselves to the electric fluid, with fatal results in several cases.'

The second volume contained several short accounts of the large numbers of Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrhaptes paradoxus* found in Britain &



Ireland in 1908 and, with the third volume, *BB* tackled its first major event in earnest. The preface to Vol. 3 opened with the statement that 'The ornithological event which has excited the most interest among our readers during the year covered by this volume has been, without doubt, the remarkable irruption of [Common] Crossbills [*Loxia curvirostra*]. The widespread character of the incursion, the large number of birds taking part in it, and the considerable number of breeding records resulting therefrom are unparalleled in the history of previous irruptions.' The editors (1910) added that 'it behoves us to make as complete a record as possible of the movement so far as it affects the British Islands.' The event was documented in minute detail over nearly 100 pages spread over several volumes. Vol. 3 also contained a colour fold-out map which detailed the extent and progress of the irruption, while Vol. 4 had the Crossbill as the subject of its frontispiece; these being among the first examples of the use of coloured artwork in *BB*.

The events surrounding the Crossbill irruption which began in 1909 evidently generated great excitement in the ornithological community and the preface to Vol. 4 lamented that 'the year covered by our fourth volume has been marked by a steady advance rather than by any very striking event in British ornithology'. It was, nevertheless, able to report that 'The Crossbill irruption and the resultant nesting have again engaged the careful attention of many contributors, and never before has such a visitation been so well and thoroughly recorded.' That the journal was able to produce such a comprehensive report was attributable to the large number of active bird-

watchers who assiduously recorded and reported their findings. There appears to have been a huge appetite for such comprehensive reporting and as each successive event occurred, the editors solicited the data required from their readers. *BB* was thus deluged with information on all sorts of more or less fascinating occurrences. Perhaps realising that a sense of perspective was required, Ticehurst's (1911b) note in Vol. 4 regarding the reported 'remarkable migration phenomena' and 'wholesale destruction that occurred in the south-east of Ireland on the night of March 29–30th, 1911' rather scathingly cautioned that 'to those who are in any way familiar with the subject of migration,



**Fig. 1.** This coloured plate showing Common Crossbills *Loxia curvirostra*, drawn by C. G. Davies from material collected in England in the spring of 1910, was one of the first instances of colour artwork in *BB*. The exceptional irruption of Crossbills which began in June 1909 was one of the first ornithological events to really seize the attention of the nation's birdwatchers, and was covered in detail in the journal.



and have taken the trouble to study the Reports of the Migration Committees of the British Association and the British Ornithologists' Club, there is no need to conjure up fanciful theories to account for this "remarkable phenomenon"... [it is] merely part of the normal spring-migration of the species concerned, but brought forcibly before the notice of even the most unobservant by a fortuitous combination of circumstances.' Perhaps he was also just a little miffed that the events were reported first not in *BB* but in the pages of *The Field* and the *Irish Times*.

The early accounts of avian events in *BB* are not only exceptionally thorough but they also do much to convey the sense of excitement that must have surrounded the events, especially when viewed alongside such relatively pedestrian contemporary contributions as 'On a supposed egg-daubing habit occasionally exhibited by the [Western] Jackdaw [*Corvus monedula*]' (Wigglesworth 1910), on 'The Tradescant Museum' (Mullens 1911) and the debate concerning 'unequal wing strokes in flight' joined by Headley (1910) and Seaby (1910), among others. It is thus perhaps a little curious that the 11-page editorial entitled 'The First Fifty Years', published in the June 1957 issue, makes no explicit mention of notable events in the bird world or the role of *BB* in reporting them. Furthermore, it is only evident from one of the 35 'Anniversary Messages' that such reports had been of interest to readers: Dr G. A. Brouwer of the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie in Leiden, The Netherlands, wrote that 'I find that many papers come to my memory again: the 1909 irruption of Crossbills (*Loxia curvirostra*) illustrated with maps, ... the effects of the hard winter 1916-17...' The message from Peter Scott may help to explain this apparent oversight, however. He wrote that 'Nowadays the occurrence of vagrants is regarded by many ornithologists as of little scientific significance - rare birds are rather *démodé*?' Might Scott's contemporaries have regarded events in much the same way as they did the occurrence of vagrants? And might it be that rather few of them were willing to admit an interest in such frivolities? Scott unashamedly continued that 'for thousands of us they provide a thrill which we occasionally experience at first hand and, more frequently, enjoy vicariously through the agency of *BB*. To that extent bird-watching has become a delightful game, and what fun to read how

others have scored.' Tom Harrison's message included the tribute to Witherby and to *BB* that 'No other single person or the periodical he founded did so much to reorientate and revitalise western ornithology.' Then of the Sarawak Museum, he somewhat wistfully added 'Ah, that we had a *Bornean Birds* as well.' Presumably, the not inconsiderable reportage of exciting events in the avian world in the journal was in no small part responsible for the revitalisation to which Harrison referred.

The journal has continued its thorough reporting of significant events in the avian world and even a cursory perusal of its pages reveals that few of the 50 years since 1957 have been uneventful. Understandably, perhaps, there has been a tendency to give less comprehensive treatment to events which have not been of record magnitude or which have essentially repeated earlier events, this especially since the appearance of the seasonal and annual reports in the late 1980s. Nevertheless, and while several younger journals and internet websites now report events almost as they happen, *BB* continues to be the place to publish comprehensive overviews of the great avian events of our time. And, whatever their scientific merit, there can be few contributions to the journal which have done as much to excite, inspire and enthuse ornithologists, young and old, in the study of the birds of these islands.

### *Effects of severe weather*

For the most part, the effects of weather on birds go unnoticed, but when birds are displaced, injured or killed in unusual numbers during unseasonal or exceptional weather, the effects tend to come to public attention and often lead to great concern for birdlife. The century covered by *BB* included some dramatic examples of how weather can affect birds and their detailed coverage in the journal has ensured that they are the most thoroughly examined of their kind ever.

### *Destructive effects of weather on seabirds*

Some of the earliest events documented in *BB* concerned the death of significant numbers of seabirds. For example, Witherby (1912) wrote that 'Undoubtedly great numbers of Little Auks (*Alle alle*) came to grief on our shores and were driven far inland during the severe weather at the end of January and beginning of February, 1912.' The birds appeared in greatest numbers



Robin Chittenden/www.harlequinpictures.co.uk

**101.** Little Auks *Alle alle* (photographed here passing Cley, Norfolk, in October 2006) are a great favourite with British birdwatchers, and the occurrence of unusual numbers in autumn, typically in November along the east coast of Britain, have been well documented in *BB*. 'Wrecks' of Little Auks, such as that during severe weather in January/February 1912 (Witherby 1912), were among the earliest events reported in the journal.

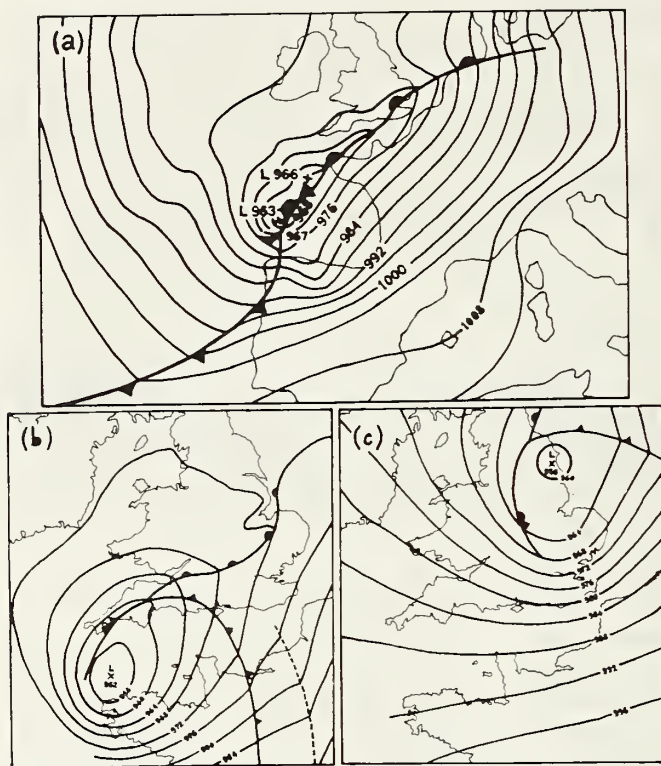
from Norfolk to the Firth of Forth, with many found far inland, even in midland and western counties. J. M. Charlton wrote that in the vicinity of St Mary's Island, Northumberland, on 18th January 'some passed so close to the shore as to be pelted with stones by boys', that on 2nd February there were 'thousands passing north during the height of the gale, flying in small parties of two to four, never more, and often singly... Some were quite "done", and settled on the rocks around us as we lay in wait for Brent Geese [*Branta bernicla*]', while on 4th February, 'dozens [were] found dead on the shore, some frozen stiff, some alive'. Another correspondent, T. H. Nelson, reported that 'on February 1st a blizzard of arctic severity, with a north-easterly gale, swept the coast, continuing for three days. Hundreds of Little Auks were seen flying before the storm, and many were found on the beach between Saltburn and the Tees mouth... Every day furnishes additional proof of the phenomenal nature of this invasion of the little northern sea-fowl, for a precedent for which we must look back to the year 1895.'

Two years later, Nelson (1914) wrote that 'Never within the memory of Cleveland residents has there been such a remarkable storm, nor one so disastrous to bird-life, as that which arose with startling suddenness, and swept over the Teesmouth, shortly after noon on July 2nd, 1914. A vivid and alarming display of lightning heralded a cyclone of terrific violence, accom-

panied by a heavy fall of hail, with large lumps of clear ice, and it was afterwards found that great havoc had been wrought amongst the seabirds in the estuary, several hundreds being killed and washed up to high-tide mark... Next day, my wife and I saw the bodies of gulls scattered in all directions, and counted upwards of three hundred within a distance of a quarter of a mile, near Redcar jetty... Almost all those I saw had broken wings or wounds on the head, and there can be no doubt that these injuries were caused by the large pieces of jagged ice driven by a furious gale... An adult [Eurasian] Curlew [*Numenius arquata*] had its skull fractured in two places, a broken wing, the neck damaged, and the tail completely shorn off.'

Successive events reported in *BB* testify to the vulnerability of seabirds to extreme weather: the seas afford them little shelter and strong winds over a protracted period, especially when food is already scarce, can prevent them from feeding efficiently. They may then starve and perish in large numbers. There were large mortalities of Leach's Storm-petrels *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* in autumn 1952 (Boyd 1954), Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla* in early 1957 (McCartan 1958), Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis* in early 1962 (Pashby & Cudworth 1969) and 2004 (Franecker 2004), auks, principally Common Guillemots *Uria aalge* and Razorbills *Alca torda*, in autumn 1969 (Hudson 1969) and Little Auks in early 1950 (Sergeant 1952). February 1983 saw the largest seabird kill yet recorded in





**Fig. 2.** These weather maps were used to show the progress of the storm in mid October 1987 that wreaked havoc upon parts of southern and eastern England, and brought exceptional numbers of storm-blown seabirds (see plate 102, below). These maps show the meteorological situation (a) in the Bay of Biscay at 18.00 GMT on 15th October 1987; (b) in the English Channel and over southern Britain at midnight on 15th/16th October; and (c) at 06.00 GMT on 16th.



**102.** An exceptionally severe storm in mid October 1987, the remnants of Hurricane Floyd, had a spectacular effect on seabirds, and resulted in an unprecedented 'wreck' including at least 250 Sabine's Gulls *Larus sabini* and 200 Grey Phalaropes *Phalaropus fulicarius*. At least 80 Grey Phalaropes were seen inland, mostly in south and east England, including a remarkable 15–20 at Grafham Water, Cambridgeshire, on 16th October. This Grey Phalarope was photographed more recently, at West Bexington, Dorset, in December 2006.

British waters. January's weather was dominated by a strong westerly airflow and unusually persistent gale-force winds, while in early February strong to gale-force northeasterlies blew down the North Sea for at least a week. These appear to have reduced foraging opportunities at a time when food supplies were already unusually scarce, and mass starvation ensued. Hume & Allsopp's (1983) preliminary report was seen to have greatly underestimated the scale of the event once the full results from beached bird surveys were known (Underwood & Stowe 1984). Just over 34,000 dead and dying seabirds, nearly 32,000 of them auks, were collected from North Sea beaches from Orkney to Kent between 7th February and 6th March 1983. Nearly 18,000 were Razorbills and over 10,000 were Common Guillemots. There were also 1,642 dead Puffins *Fratercula arctica*, 1,207 Little Auks, 7 Black Guillemots *Cepphus grylle* and almost 2,400 corpses of a further 47 species.

#### *Exceptional seabird passages and inland displacements*

The effects of unusually strong winds are perhaps most obvious when large numbers of displaced seabirds are brought within sight of land-based observers. Appendix 1 includes some of the more spectacular seabird passages to have been reported in *BB*. One of the most celebrated was that observed from St

Ives, Cornwall, on 3rd September 1983. Allsopp & Hume (1983) reported that among the seabirds passing the headland that day were an estimated 20,000 Northern Gannets *Morus bassanus*, 25,000 Manx Puffins *Puffinus puffinus*, 250 Sooty *P. griseus*, 50 Great *P. gravis* and one Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*, 10,000 European *Hydrobates pelagicus*, about 10 Leach's and one Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*, 450 Great *Stercorarius skua*, 245 Arctic *S. parasiticus*, 20 Pomarine *S. pomarinus* and two Long-tailed Skuas *S. longicaudus* and 100 Sabine's Gulls *Larus sabini*. There were lesser, but still extraordinary counts from many other west-coast watchpoints. Such events generate much excitement among birdwatchers. A passage of Leach's Storm-petrels in September 1978, for example, saw large numbers pass Irish Sea watchpoints. Madge & Allsopp (1978) reported that at the mouth of the River Mersey, 'thousands must have been involved, and counts of over 500 were made on several days. Birdwatchers flocked to the area to witness the sight and few were disappointed, as some birds flew between observers, and dipped over pools on the shore.'

Seabirds have often ventured far inland during such movements. For example, unusually large numbers were found in the English midlands following northeasterly gales and blizzards on 25th and 26th April 1981 (Nightingale & Sharrock 1982), with remarkable counts (for inland areas) of 717 Arctic Terns *Sterna parasidis*, 580 Kittiwakes (including as many as 300 at Pitsford Reservoir, Northamptonshire, on 26th April), 57 Northern Gannets, 44 Sandwich Terns *S. sandvicensis*, 24 Little Gulls *L. minutus* and 17 Fulmars. The passage of a storm in October 1987 brought more unusual visitors far inland. Wind speeds in excess of 110 km/hr are not unusual in the far north and northwest of the UK but are rarely experienced in the south and east. Wind speeds in southern and southeast England during the northeastwards passage of former Hurricane Floyd on 15th and 16th October 1987, during which gusts exceeded 145 km/hr in London, were the greatest since records began in 1703. The wind toppled 15 million trees and caused widespread damage and destruction to buildings, vehicles and the country's communication infrastructure and had an immediate and spectacular effect on seabirds (Hume & Christie 1989). There was an unprecedented 'wreck' of at least

250 Sabine's Gulls and 200 Grey Phalaropes *Phalaropus fulicarius*. Over 100 of the former and about 80 of the latter were inland, with Grafham Water, Cambridgeshire, supporting about seven Sabine's Gulls on 18th and 15–20 Grey Phalaropes on 16th; the Sabine's Gull records were the first for the county since 1839. The largest numbers of Sabine's Gulls, however, were found along the south coast of England, notably in Dorset and Hampshire, especially on 18th and 19th as birds began to make their way back to the Atlantic. At least 120 and probably over 140 Sabine's Gulls were reported from Hampshire, with at least 50 in the Pennington/Hurst area alone on 18th, and among at least 120 reported from Dorset, 58 moved west past Hengistbury Head on 19th. About 60 Grey Phalaropes were off Hope's Nose, Devon, on 18th. The relative numbers of other displaced seabirds were small, though on 18th in Devon, 3,000 European Storm-petrels passed Hope's Nose in three hours and 52 Leach's Storm-petrels passed Dawlish Warren.

#### *Effects of severe weather on landbirds and freshwater birds*

Weather events that affect seabirds rarely have a discernable effect on landbirds, but the October 1987 storm was of such exceptional severity that its passage was to have a profound effect on terrestrial birdlife. As millions of trees were toppled, the territories of many woodland birds were reduced or destroyed, while species that favoured open habitats, especially those on which pines (Pinaceae) had been planted, were to benefit greatly. Much of the subsequent increase in our Wood Lark *Lullula arborea* and European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* populations, for example, is a result of the passage of that storm (Morris *et al.* 1994; Wotton & Gillings 2000). Land- and freshwater birds appear, however, to be more often affected by severe cold than strong winds, and the pages of *BB* vividly describe the effects of several periods of such weather on birds.

#### *Winters of extreme cold 1916/17*

Although the accounts of the severe weather of 1916/17 are only rudimentarily quantitative, they nevertheless provide a vividly graphic description of the effects on birds. The cold first struck in late November 1916 and temperatures remained well below normal until mid April



across most of Britain & Ireland. There were 33 consecutive days of frost at Limerick, Co. Limerick, 41 at Hampstead, Greater London, and 91 on Dartmoor, Devon. Jordain & Witherby (1918) reported that the frost 'held the earth ironbound even to the very edge of the sea, and was accompanied by snow, which buried the scanty supplies of food still available' adding that 'the "glazed frosts" which covered even the tree trunks with a thin film of ice, probably proved especially fatal to the creepers [*Certhia familiaris*], Tits [*Paridae*] and other tree-haunting species.' They reported that 'the widespread destruction of Bird-life... was so noticeable that it attracted the attention of the least observant... A great part of Ireland and most of the Cornish coast, which for generations have furnished a refuge to frozen-out immigrants, were experiencing the most severe climatic conditions of which we have definite records.' Indeed, Carroll (1917) reported that 'In the south of Ireland, hard relentless frosts and unprecedented snowstorms began in November, 1916, and lasted – without interruption – until the middle of April, 1917, causing the destruction of birds in incredible numbers. A continuous three weeks' frost was followed early in February by heavy snow, which drifted to a depth of over ten feet, rendering many

roads quite impassable. Birds were then dying everywhere... Redwings [*Turdus iliacus*], always the first to collapse in hard weather, suffered dreadfully and were strewn around everywhere dead. For warmth at night, they stuffed themselves into every available hole, and when I was sawing timber I found their frozen remains tightly wedged into narrow cracks. Soon after that they all disappeared and I have not since seen any.' Wallace (1917) reported that in Cornwall, Northern Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* 'frequented little town gardens, tripping feebly on tiny grass-plots in front of suburban houses, pecking among gooseberry-bushes at the back, constantly chased by lapdogs, but constantly returning. They came to the windows for food, and died in gardens, beside roads, and in every field, and along frozen drains' and that Redwings 'died in incalculable numbers in ditches and woods.' Jourdain & Witherby (1918) observed that 'the diminution of resident species was most marked during the following summer, and in some cases the destruction was so great as to result in local extermination.' Among the many affected species were Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*, whose numbers were estimated at 20% of usual in Lancashire in 1917, Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*, which was 'apparently almost exterminated, hardly any

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103. A small number of Snowy Owls *Bubo scandiacus* became resident in Shetland during the 1960s, but it was in June 1967 that Bobby Tulloch discovered a nest with eggs on Fetlar, the first documented breeding record in Britain. Snowy Owls continued to breed on Fetlar for the next nine years, with a total of 23 chicks fledged between 1967 and 1975. This photograph shows the male bird at the nest in June 1967.

being reported in 1917' and the Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*, which was 'brought perilously near to extermination'. Gurney (1918) commented that in Norfolk 'not many inland species received a harder blow than the Black-bird *T. merula*, one result of which was that when the summer came round again, gardeners were saved the trouble of netting their strawberries.' Carroll (1917) remarked that in the south of Ireland 'the dried feathery remains which drift about wherever one goes testify to the hardest winter in living memory'.

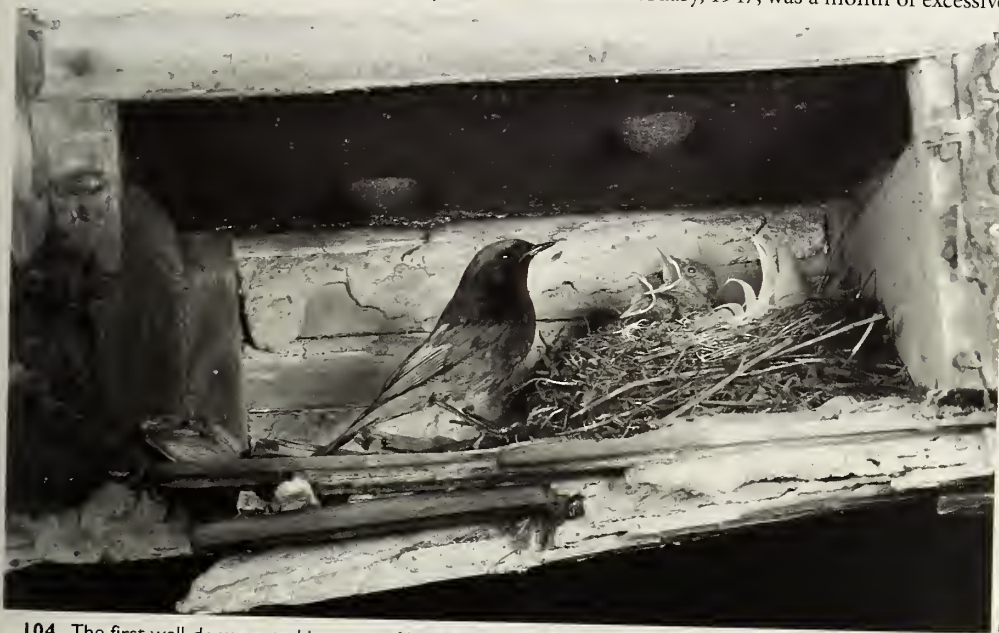
#### Early 1929 and 1939/40

During the next bout of severe cold weather, in early 1929, the west of Ireland, Wales and Cornwall remained relatively mild and Witherby & Jourdain (1929) were able to state that 'some of the reports we have received from coastal districts and from reservoirs give graphic evidence of severe mortality and in some districts resident birds have diminished, but it is clear that the severe weather of February, 1929, produced no such widespread effect on our resident birds as did the very prolonged severe weather of 1916–1917.' The winter of 1939/40, however, was the coldest hitherto experienced in the twentieth century over Britain & Ireland as a whole and the cold of January 1940 was, by far,

the most severe of the three cold winters until that date. Perhaps the most significant features of the winter were the ice-storms which coated vegetation in a thick layer of ice and which were of exceptional intensity for this country. Ticehurst & Witherby (1940) reported that the more usually sedentary insectivorous passerines, denied their usual foraging areas, were reduced hugely in numbers across large swathes of the countryside. Treecreeper losses, for example, were estimated to be in the order of 50–80% in nine English counties and in the Isle of Man.

#### 1946/47

The winter of 1946/47 must have been especially miserable. Ticehurst & Hartley (1948) summarised the events and its effects. 'From January 19th to 22nd, temperatures remained below 40°F in many places, and on January 23rd, a cold northeast wind heralded the really severe weather... On the morning of January 30th, a reading of -5°F (37 degrees of frost) was recorded at Writtle in Essex, and on that day a temperature of -6°F occurred at Elmstone, Kent. Snow fell during the last week of the month all over England; on January 30th, there was a fall of 7 inches of snow in the Scilly Isles... February, 1947, was a month of excessive



104. The first well-documented instance of breeding by Black Redstarts *Phoenicurus ochrurus* in Britain was of two pairs on the cliffs of Sussex in 1923. The first birds nested in London in 1926, on the derelict site of the previous year's Wembley Exhibition, but the availability of suitable habitat during the Second World War and the early post-war years meant that the species gained a more solid foothold in England. This photograph shows a male attending a nest near St Paul's Cathedral in central London in June 1951.

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severity. It was generally the coldest month since February, 1895' and 'there was no day through the month in which snow did not fall in some part of Britain.' Falls of more than a foot of snow in 24 hours were frequently recorded, and it 'seems certain that at no time has England been more snow-bound since 1814, the year of the last "Frost Fair" on the Thames.' Ticehurst & Hartley continued that 'winds from an easterly point, which began to blow on January 22nd, continued without intermission until February 22nd, giving one of

the longest spells (if not the longest) of east wind recorded in Britain... In the first ten days of March, 1947, there was no break in the frost, ice floes in the North Sea contributing to keep temperatures low... By the morning of the 6th, the snow cover at Clawydd-newydd in Denbighshire was 5 feet deep. There were drifts 25 feet deep in Radnorshire, and drifts of 16–20 feet were by no means uncommon elsewhere in Wales and in midland England... After the middle of the month heavy rains combined with the melting of great accumulations of



Fig. 3. The rapid colonisation of Britain & Ireland by the Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* became one of the keynote avian events of the 1950s and 1960s. This colour plate was painted specially for *BB* by Richard Richardson to accompany the paper documenting the first accepted records of Collared Dove in Britain (Richardson et al. 1957).

snow to cause the worst floods of many years.' Unsurprisingly, 'The beginning of the period of intense cold was marked by a large-scale movement of birds in a westerly direction through the counties of the southern coast' but still 'Great numbers of dead [Common] Starlings [*Sturnus vulgaris*], Mistle Thrushes [*T. viscivorus*], Fieldfares [*T. pilaris*], Song Thrushes [*T. philomelos*] and Redwings were found, the records being most numerous from the southern and western counties... The Scilly Islands were described as "littered" with the bodies of Lapwings, and considerable numbers were picked up in Cornwall and west Pembrokeshire.' The effects on individual species are detailed in the report, with the Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus* apparently suffering as severely as any species: 'of 12 reports of status, no fewer than 7 refer to extermination, and 4 more to heavy reductions.' The Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* population 'was reduced to the lowest level recorded since records of numbers began in 1928.'

1962/63

Dobinson & Richards (1964) provided a detailed, if much less evocative, account of the exceptionally severe and protracted winter of 1962/63. This winter was the coldest in central and southern England since 1740, the snowiest for 150 years, many lakes, rivers, beaches and even inshore waters were frozen for protracted periods and freezing fog coated branches and other surfaces with a layer of ice. However, many northern and western parts of Britain and Ireland escaped the worst of the weather. At the onset of severe weather, there were 'wholesale, and countrywide' cold-weather movements of many species towards the south and west, Lapwings and Sky Larks *Alauda arvensis* being especially prominent. During early January, 'movements into towns and to unfrozen shorelines resulted in spectacular congregations of the hungry and dying.' Birds disappeared completely from many areas and there was heavy mortality during January and February, particularly among Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*, Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, Lapwing, Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*, Curlew, Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Common Coot *Fulica atra*, Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*, Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*, Redwing and Starling. The then newly available radar technology was applied to chart the

northwestwards return, during February and March, of the many birds that had successfully escaped the severe weather. Had refugia not been available in the far south and west of Britain & Ireland and in continental Europe, the scale of destruction might have been much greater. Nevertheless, the effects on the breeding populations of the more sedentary and smaller species and those dependent upon wetlands, notably Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, Barn Owl *Tyto alba*, Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*, Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*, Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*, Common Stonechat, Goldcrest and Long-tailed Tit, were all too obvious by the spring of 1963. Kingfishers, for example, were extirpated across large swathes of countryside and just 11–12 pairs of Dartford Warblers *Sylvia undata* were known to have survived the winter (Tubbs 1967; Bibby & Tubbs 1975). Nevertheless, as the recently instigated Common Birds Census was able to document, many species recovered rapidly. Simms (1965), who studied the Blackbirds in the Dollis Hill area of London, provided a particularly detailed record, both of the impact of the weather on this species and of their capacity to recover. He reported that the 'cold weather of January 1963 resulted in the almost complete evacuation of the area' and a 55% reduction in the number of Blackbirds breeding there in spring 1963. However, the number of singing males in the area in spring 1964 was 'far in excess of the previous territorial strength'.

### *Effects of exceptionally cold weather in continental Europe*

The weather need not be especially severe in Britain & Ireland for its effects to be noticed here. For example, the 1978/79 winter saw at least three major influxes of waterbirds into Britain & Ireland (Chandler 1981), escaping exceptionally severe weather in continental Europe. Though the weather in Britain & Ireland was cold, the coldest since the 1962/63 winter, it was still relatively mild compared with that on the continent, and the influxes, especially those of mid February 1979, brought large numbers of divers, grebes, sawbills and seaduck, most notably Red-necked Grebes *Podiceps grisegena*, Smew *Mergellus albellus*, Red-breasted Mergansers *Mergus serrator* and Goosanders *M. merganser*. The first of these appeared 'in numbers unprecedented this





**105.** Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta* became extinct as a breeding bird in Britain and Ireland in the mid nineteenth century, but the steady recolonisation of the English east coast began in the early 1940s when suitable habitat was formed as part of the coastal defences intended to deter an invasion of Britain. This photograph shows a pair at the nest on Havergate Island, Suffolk, in 1951.

century' (Chandler 1981) and were widespread across England and Scotland, though rather few reached Wales or Ireland. Chandler described their arrival as 'the most dramatic event of the winter'. At their peak, there were some 481 Red-necked Grebes in Britain & Ireland. Smew were widespread west to Cornwall, Dyfed and Co. Galway, with at least 380 in early January, including 41 at Shingle Street, Suffolk, on 5th January. At their peak, there were an estimated 428 Red-breasted Mergansers inland, and among exceptional counts from coastal waters were those of 215 on Hamford Water, Essex, on 14th January and 169 on the Orwell, Suffolk, on 3rd March. The cold weather also brought significant numbers of both Long-eared *Asio otus* and Short-eared Owls *A. flammeus* and of Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus* (Davenport 1982). There were an estimated 753 Hen Harriers in England early in 1979, mostly along the south and east coasts, northwards to North Yorkshire. Roosts with ten or more birds were widespread but one of 27 at Stodmarsh, Kent, on 11th February was exceptional. Large numbers of Long-eared Owls were found along the east coast northwards to Orkney and Shetland. Over 600 roosting birds were found, with individual roosts of 20 and 24 birds in Orkney, 21 in Northumberland and 32 in Kent. Short-eared Owls were found yet more widely, penetrating much farther west than the other species

involved. A minimum of 1,549 were reported from England alone, with roosts of 20 or more in Cheshire, Suffolk, Co. Durham and Oxfordshire, and a roost of 16 in Cornwall. While there were no reports of unusual numbers in the winter from other parts of Britain & Ireland, the winter influx was preceded by an impressive autumn arrival, which in the far southwest and in the Northern Isles was on an unprecedented scale. Cornwall saw the passage of 50 or so Short-eared Owls during October and November and among many high counts from the far north were those from Fair Isle, Shetland, which held a then-record 10 Long-eared and 30 Short-eared Owls on 15th–16th October 1978.

### *Falls, rushes and hold-ups*

By the advent of *BB*, the appearances of sometimes quite spectacular numbers of passage migrants during spring and autumn 'falls', 'rushes' and 'hold-ups' were well-known and eagerly anticipated phenomena, especially evident to those watching the east coast and offshore islands. The journal often contained brief reports of the more significant of these events, with early examples including the mass arrival of migrants along the east coast in November 1923 (Riviere 1924), and the widespread arrival of Robins *Erithacus rubecula* in Norfolk in September 1933, where, 'in the bushes on Blakeney

Point, on a frontage of about two miles, there must have been about 3,000' (Payn 1934).

The large-scale displacement of migrants in spring is more unusual and infrequent than in autumn, so the widespread arrival of migrants in the Northern Isles and along the North Sea coast in May 1936 was given extensive coverage. Large numbers of Pied Flycatchers *Ficedula hypoleuca* and Common Redstarts *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* were then reported from Norfolk, Lincolnshire and the Isle of May for example, with lesser numbers of Wrynecks *Jynx torquilla*, Black Redstarts *P. ochruros* and Whinchats *Saxicola rubetra* (Garnett 1936; Midlothian Ornithological Club 1936; Pye 1936). Common Chiffchaffs *Phylloscopus collybita* and Willow Warblers *Ph. trochilus* were also exceptionally numerous. On Fair Isle, George Stout wrote 'What an enormous number of birds we had the whole of the first half of May, but mainly on the 7th and 8th... There were thousands of Willow-Warblers and Chiffchaffs... an enormous number of Pied and Spotted Flycatchers [*Muscicapa striata*], some [Common] Chaffinches [*Fringilla coelebs*], hundreds of Bramblings [*F. montifringilla*] and Reed Buntings [*Emberiza schoeniclus*] and a mixture of the other buntings – Ortolan [*E. hortulana*], Corn [*E. calandra*], Yellow [Yellowhammer *E. citrinella*] and Little [*E. pusilla*]... hundreds of Lesser Whitethroats [*Sylvia curruca*]... Greenland [Northern] Wheatears *Oenanthe oenanthe* and Common Redstarts' and 'sixty Bluethroats [*Luscinia svecica*] on 7th and 8th, mainly red-spotted' (Midlothian Ornithological Club 1936).

The large autumn falls of 1956 and 1958 were also reported thoroughly, with a detailed examination of the factors associated with the arrivals (Williamson 1959). However, the more usual tendency has been to give brief summary accounts of the arrival of migrants in the journal's monthly, seasonal or annual reports. Notably large arrivals or movements thus reported include those of 200–250 Black Redstarts on the Calf of Man in November 1939 (Williamson 1940); 20,000 Wood Pigeons over Thanet, Kent, on the morning of 21st November 1959, with similarly huge numbers at many other places around this date (Williamson & Ferguson-Lees 1960); large numbers of Blackbirds on 5th November 1961, when 858 birds were ringed and an additional 100,000 passed over Gibraltar Point, Lin-

colnshire, 647 were ringed out of at least 8,000 at Spurn, East Yorkshire, and a farmer in Suffolk reported them as 'three to a yard all over the fields' (Ferguson-Lees & Williamson 1961); exceptional numbers of Ring Ouzels *T. torquatus* in 1966, 1974 and in 1998 (Ferguson-Lees 1966; Christie 1974; Nightingale 1999); Red-backed Shrikes *Lanius collurio*, Icterine Warblers *Hippolais icterina*, Wrynecks and other drift migrants on the east coast in 1977 (Allsopp & Madge 1977); Bluethroats in 1985, when there were 54 in Norfolk and 100 on the Isle of May, Fife, on 14th and 15th May, respectively (Allsopp & Dawson 1985); various thrushes and far-eastern passerines in 1988 (Dawson *et al.* 1988; Elkins 1991; Boddy 1992); and huge numbers of Common Redstarts in 1995 (Nightingale & Allsopp 1996).

The mass arrivals of migrants in two particular years, however, either involved such a diversity of normally very scarce and charismatic species or were on such a scale that they received unusually detailed treatment in the journal.

### Displacement of Red-footed Falcons and other species in May and June 1992

Spring 1992, described as 'superlative' by Nightingale & Allsopp (1992), will long be remembered by birdwatchers for its influx of Red-footed Falcons *Falco vespertinus*. At least 120 were found in Britain & Ireland – over ten times the annual average until then – and many observers were able to see one if not several birds from mid May to early June, with three on the Ouse Washes, Cambridgeshire, on 16th May and six at Stodmarsh, Kent, on 23rd–25th May. Five at Ballyconnelly, Co. Galway, on 28th April brought the Irish all-time total to 12! Most were found in the south and east of England, but some wandered as far north as Shetland and west to Cornwall, Pembrokeshire and Co. Galway. Nightingale & Allsopp (1994a) placed the influx in the context of numbers on the near-continent, which in some countries were also larger than normal or of record proportions. They also discussed the weather conditions, noting that the influx was associated with a northwards shift in the jet-stream, which brought exceptionally warm airflows (containing the aerial prey favoured by the falcons) from southern Europe across eastern England, and also the presence of an anticyclone over Scandinavia, which fed the warm air westwards across the North Sea. To the east, a low-pressure



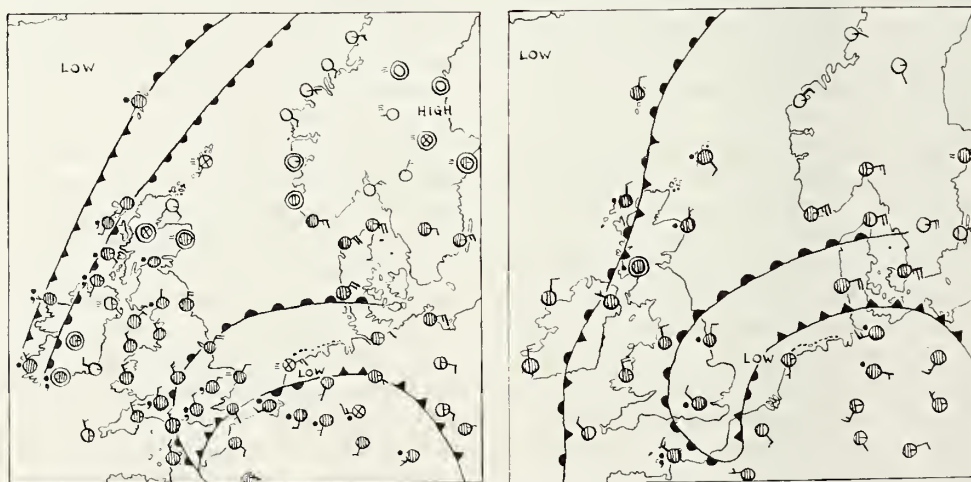
system north of the Black Sea brought a flow of air from eastern Europe across the Baltic.

Red-footed Falcons were, however, not the only species to appear in unusual numbers in spring 1992. About 100 Golden Orioles *Oriolus oriolus* occurred in the latter half of May, as did large numbers of Red-throated Pipits *Anthus cervinus* (nine were found on Fair Isle alone between 17th and 31st May) and 'Grey-headed Wagtails' *Motacilla flava thunbergi* (25 were seen at Happisburgh, Norfolk, on 15th May and seven on Fair Isle on 29th). White-winged Black Terns *Chlidonias leucopterus* appeared in record numbers, as did Common Rosefinches *Carpodacus erythrinus*, 12 on Fair Isle on 1st June contributing to a record UK spring total of some 156 birds (Wallace 1999). There was an exceptional influx of Spotted Flycatchers, including 400 on North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 350 on Fair Isle and 100 on Unst, Shetland, on 27th May. Both Red-backed Shrikes and Icterine Warblers arrived in force, some 200 of the former and 175 of the latter in the second half of May and the first ten days of June, including 20 Red-backed Shrikes and 11 Icterine Warblers on Fair Isle on 27th May (the latter contributing to a remarkable Shetland total for that period of about 100 birds). The period also saw a large influx of about 55 Marsh Warblers *Acrocephalus palustris*, record numbers of Greenish Warblers *Ph. trochiloides* and a host of rare birds,

including 21 Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis*, several extreme vagrants and at least two 'firsts' for Britain, Lesser Short-toed Lark *Calandrella rufescens* in Dorset and Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata* in North Yorkshire (Rogers *et al.* 1993). Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the numbers of migrants at large, Red-backed Shrikes bred again (and successfully) in Suffolk after a three-year absence and four or five pairs of Common Rosefinches bred at Flamborough, East Yorkshire, a further two pairs probably bred in Suffolk and a pair built a nest on Lundy, Devon – the first confirmed breeding records for England (Wallace 1999).

### The 'great immigration' of early September 1965

Notwithstanding the high diversity and large numbers of scarce migrants recorded in spring 1992, for sheer numbers of birds involved, few arrivals can compare with that of early September 1965 (Davis 1966). This 'vast fall of North European migrants' occurred principally on the east-facing coast of East Anglia on 3rd September 1965 and Davis's account, which relates the events to the weather patterns at the time and discusses their development in the context of the then current theories concerning bird migration, is wonderfully vivid and must surely rank as one of the most exciting papers printed in the journal's 100-year run.



**Fig. 4.** These weather maps accompanied the analysis of 'The great immigration of early September 1965', written by Peter Davis of the BTO (Davis 1966). At 06.00 GMT on 3rd September 1965 (left), a large fall of migrants was occurring at Vlieland, The Netherlands, ahead of the north-moving belt of rain; at the same time the first birds were arriving on the English east coast, at Spurn in East Yorkshire and elsewhere. By 12.00 GMT (right), significant arrivals of migrants were apparent in the northerly airstream from Norfolk north to Yorkshire, while the extraordinary arrival in Suffolk was to follow in the next two hours or so as the front, and a shift in the wind direction to southeast, reached the coast.

The weather pattern now regarded as 'classic' prevailed, with birds migrating SSW from Scandinavia in the clear skies and the light winds associated with an anticyclone over Scandinavia. They ran into the heavy rain and southeasterly winds of the leading edge of a deep low-pressure system as it tracked northwest across the North Sea, East Anglia and much of the east coast of England and Scotland during 3rd September. Birds appeared in unprecedented numbers along the coast of Suffolk and Norfolk and though there were also large numbers northwards along the east coast to Shetland, counts at all localities paled against the quantity of migrants grounded along the Suffolk coast.

At least half a million birds of 78 species were reckoned to occupy the Suffolk coast between Sizewell and Hopton on 3rd September. 'At Lowestoft, at 13.15 GMT, a huge cloud of small birds was seen to appear over the town, moving towards the south, with individual birds dropping out continuously; the town itself was soon alive with birds hopping about in every garden and open space, on walls and television aerials, in all the streets (where many were killed by traffic), on the sea-wall and even among the groyne on the beaches. Two people in different parts of the town had the extraordinary experience of Common Redstarts descending from the mass of migrants overhead and alighting on their shoulders.' On the morning of the 4th, it was estimated that 'no less than 30,000 birds were seen' along a three-mile stretch of road from Lowestoft to Pakefield and a fortunate D. J. Pearson 'encountered an estimated 15,000 Redstarts, 8,000 Wheatears, 4,000 Pied Flycatchers, 3,000 Garden Warblers [*S. borin*], 1,500 Whinchats and as many Tree Pipits [*Anthus trivialis*], 1,000 Willow Warblers, 500 Whitethroats, and smaller numbers of Spotted Flycatchers and Robins. His other figures for the day included at least 40 Wrynecks, 20 Ring Ouzels, 20 Bluethroats, a Great Reed Warbler [*Acrocephalus arundinaceus*] (caught), an Icterine Warbler and two Barred Warblers [*S. nisoria*].' Davis noted that 'the number of Wrynecks recorded is one of the most extraordinary features of the period; even the most conservative reckoning gives a score of 280 seen, and it is likely that there were many hundreds in East Anglia alone. The Bluethroat totals, allowing for the bird's very skulking habits, cannot have been much lower.'

### *Arrivals of scarce species in unusual numbers*

More usually scarce species often appear during falls of migrants, but they may also appear in numbers that greatly exceed the 'norm' under a variety of other circumstances. For example, strong southerly airflows may induce north-bound spring migrants to 'overshoot' their destinations while easterly airflows may lead to the appearance of otherwise scarce species from Siberia. Some arrivals may be difficult to relate to the weather – either in this country or at their presumed point of departure. Elkins (2005) provided a modern overview of the effects of the weather on bird migration.

There have been some remarkable arrivals and movements of seabirds in the last 100 years. For example, Ferguson-Lees & Williamson (1960) reported a wholly unprecedented number of phalaropes (both Grey and Red-necked *Phalaropus lobatus*, though probably chiefly Grey) off St Agnes, Scilly, on 15th September 1960: 'a minimum figure of 1,000 was put down by the observers, but the birds were all over the sea in parties of 20–50 and extended beyond telescope range, so that there could easily have been several times that total.' They also reported that 'a concentration of somewhere between 500 and 1,000 was noted on calm seas at St Ives [Cornwall] on 16th', and 'another of these staggering gatherings appeared off Torquay [Devon] on the 5th [October], this one involving at least 700 birds.' Among the catalogue of exceptional totals from elsewhere were 320, possibly 500, off Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, on 20th September.

The number of Cory's Shearwaters observed during August 1980 was also without precedent. Hume & Allsopp (1980) reported that the month 'will be remembered as one of the most remarkable ever for seabirds off British and Irish coasts. Reports of Cory's Shearwaters began as exceptional and soon became scarcely credible as all previous records were shattered.' A phenomenal 1,400 birds passed Porthgwarra, Cornwall, on 12th and 2,607 passed Cape Clear the next day. A wholly unprecedented 10,939 passed Cape Clear, together with 250 Great Shearwaters on 16th. Vast numbers of Sooty Shearwaters also passed Irish coasts in September 1980, with a flock of 6,000 off Loup Head, Co. Clare, on 10th September.

Among terrestrial species, the movement of European Honey-buzzards *Pernis apivorus* in autumn 2000 was extraordinary, with more



than ten times the number recorded in the previous best year (Fraser & Rogers 2002). An influx of at least 1,900 birds began in mid September and continued through the first ten days of October, with reports from Shetland south-east to Sussex and southwest to Scilly. About a third of the records came from Sussex but exceptional numbers were reported from many counties, though Essex, Kent, Yorkshire, Hampshire and Dorset contributed the lion's share of the remainder. Large numbers flew over some sites in September, with counts (taken from relevant county bird reports) including 25 over Twycross, Leicestershire, on 25th, 31 over Abberton Reservoir, Essex, on 22nd and 63 over Beachy Head, Sussex, on 30th. The influx was probably associated with an unusually strong easterly to southeasterly airflow and the passage first eastwards, then westwards, of an occluded front over the North Sea.

Appendix 1 provides reference to a selection of the more exceptional appearances or movements of the last 100 years which have been reported in *BB* and which are not otherwise mentioned in the text. For the most part, it excludes the arrivals of rarities, as their numbers, even in influx years, tend to remain small. Some of the larger or more unusual events have been the subject of full papers in *BB*, often with detailed accounts of the weather prior to and during the events and speculation as to their cause. It is notable that more recent events tend to dominate the table. To a large extent this is because as time elapses, the greater is the chance that earlier events will be eclipsed. On the other hand, there has been a general tendency for repeats of past events to be accorded much less written attention than they might otherwise attract and the reports of many recent events are less full than might have been the case had they occurred early in the twentieth century. This is well illustrated by reference to Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* passage. During an influx in May 1946, 'the numbers involved... were quite exceptional' and there followed a series of well-reported spring and autumn influxes (Anon. 1947; Hinde 1949; Hinde & Wood 1950; Goodbody 1951; Butterfield & Williamson 1955; Dickens 1955; Pickering 1958; Williamson & Ferguson-Lees 1959a, 1959b), involving such 'exceptional' and 'spectacular' numbers as the 480 birds at Chew Reservoir, Somerset, on 21st September 1957 and 2,000 in the Swale Estuary, Kent, on 28th

August 1960. The astounding passage of early to mid September 1992, by contrast, when 10,215 passed Dungeness, Kent, on 6th September and 650 were inland at Rutland Water, Leicestershire, on 11th September, received comparatively scant treatment (Nightingale & Allsopp 1993).

### *Irruptions*

The arrival of some species, notably northern terrestrial species, is related much more to food availability in the northern forests and tundras than to any vagaries of the weather, although harsh winter weather may well be a factor in determining the numbers of birds which move and the distance they travel. Food availability in northern latitudes varies considerably between years, and when staple autumn foods such as birch *Betula* and spruce *Picea* seeds, rowan *Sorbus* berries or small mammals are in short supply and birds are more than usually numerous (perhaps after a good breeding season following a winter when food supplies were abundant), such species make large-scale south to southwest movements. The two species which have most frequently been involved in large-scale irruptions in Britain & Ireland in the past 100 years are Common Crossbill and Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus*.

### *Common Crossbill*

The Crossbill irruption which began in June 1909 had the honour of being the first avian event to be dealt with in depth by *BB*. In calling for information, the editors (1910) remarked that 'we think that the progress of the irruption cannot be too fully recorded'. Subsequent coverage of the event was extensive and detailed, a testimony to the mass of records submitted by the journal's readership. The first birds were reported from Fair Isle on 23rd June 1909 and here 'numbers afterwards increased, as if the birds had come to the island in a series of waves, and as many as 300 were seen some days' (Witherby & Alexander 1911). By mid July, there had been widespread reports from much of Scotland and England and by autumn, individuals or parties of up to several tens had been reported from throughout Britain & Ireland. Birds appeared to be most numerous to the south and east of a line between Portland, Dorset, and the Wash. The first nest was found near Thetford, Norfolk, on 12th January 1910 and nests were subsequently reported from 12

English counties and from Ireland. Noble (1910) reported that the first Norfolk nest was found by 'a workman walking home along the railway line near Thetford'. He 'saw a Crossbill feeding young. He threw a stone at them, killing the old bird and one of the nestlings; two other nestlings were taken alive, and he is now trying to rear them.' Noble added in his report to the editors that 'I am sending the dead Crossbill', later adding that 'Since writing, the two young ones have died, and I now enclose them too!' The next significant irruption was in 1927 but though numbers appeared rather fewer, birds were still widespread and pairs bred again (in Hampshire and Dorset) (Jourdain 1928). The subsequent irruptions of 1929, 1930, 1935, 1942, 1953, 1956, 1962/63, 1966, 1972, 1985, 1990 and 1997 all received considerable coverage in the pages of *BB* (e.g. The editors 1929 & 1935, Barraud 1956, Smith 1959, Davis 1964, Nightingale & Allsopp 1991b).

### Waxwing

Waxwings have evidently been as much a favourite with *BB* editors and writers as they have with the general public. The journal has reported some exceptional irruptions of these beautiful visitors from the forests of the far north, including those of 1913/14, 1921/22, 1931/32, 1932/33, 1936/37, 1941/42, 1943/44, 1946/47, 1948/49, 1949/50, 1956/57–1959/60, 1961/62, 1963/64, 1965/66, 1970/71, 1988/89, 1990/91, 1995/96, 1996/97, 1999/2000, 2000/01, 2003/04 and 2004/05. Appeals for information enabled some of the larger and earlier irruptions to be reported thoroughly. Gibb (1948), for example, wrote that the irruption of winter 1946/47 was then the 'heaviest recorded for which comparative details are available'. At least 6,000 birds were in Scotland in late 1946 and large flocks were reported from elsewhere, including 300 at Ravensworth Park, Co. Durham, on 5th December. Waxwings travelled as far west and southwest as Co. Antrim and Scilly, where three flocks held at least 100 birds on 24th December. Winter

1965/66 also saw an exceptionally large irruption. By mid October, large numbers were being reported, with 230 birds at Holkham, Norfolk, on 19th, and 200 in Co. Derry by the end of the month, by which time 'there were huge numbers in Scotland, hundreds all along the east coast of England from the border of the Wash, and big concentrations, amounting to at least 1,500, in East Anglia.' Arrivals continued into November, with 200 passing through Fair Isle on 1st at the same time as 'flocks of over 100 were becoming commonplace' on the east coast down to Kent. There were about 1,000 in Louth, Lincolnshire, on 9th November and, with the irruption then at its peak, there were an estimated 11,300 birds in Britain & Ireland (Cornwallis & Townsend 1968).



Hugh Harrop

**106.** Large irruptions of Waxwings *Bombus garrulus* into Britain & Ireland have traditionally been reported in some detail in *BB* since the journal's inception and it seems that these striking birds are as popular with editors and authors as they are with birders and the general public. These particular birds were photographed in Shetland in November 2005.



Nightingale & Allsopp (1997) briefly documented the more recent irruption of winter 1995/96, which, 'eclipsing all other events in 1996' involved 'in excess of 10,000 birds'. The largest numbers appeared in urban areas and peaked between mid February and mid March. There were flocks of 285 in Norwich (with over 600 birds in the vicinity of the city and 1,200 in Norfolk as a whole), 450 at Kesgrave, Suffolk, 510 in Nottingham, 500 birds in Sheffield, 700 in Leeds, 510 in Stockport, Greater Manchester, 500 in Aberdeen and 167 in Dublin. By contrast, the largest flock reported from Orkney was of 12 birds and the peak Shetland count was of 40 birds. One individual had travelled as far southwest as Scilly by 23rd April. As if this were not excitement enough, a lone Cedar Waxwing *B. cedrorum* was identified amongst the trilling hordes in Nottingham on 20th February and remained in the city until 18th March. The rather scant accounts of the exceptional influxes of 2003/04 and 2004/05 include reports of flocks as large as 1,800 birds, at Kinloch, Northeast Scotland, on 21st November 2004 (Nightingale & McGeehan 2005).

### Other irruptive species

#### Scarce species

The 1908 Pallas's Sandgrouse arrival was the first irruption to be reported in *BB* (Witherby 1908). On a much smaller scale than the irruptions of the late nineteenth century, the event received rather limited coverage and certainly much less than if it had been known at the time that there would be no recurrence within the following 100 years. Some 30–40 birds were reported from Yorkshire, 15 in Essex, 12 in Hampshire, ten in Oxfordshire, seven or eight in Hertfordshire, three in both Kent and Surrey and ones and twos in Norfolk, Cheshire, Staffordshire and Berkshire.

Parrot Crossbills *Loxia pytyopsittacus* have appeared in large numbers on three occasions. The 1962/63 influx saw large numbers in the Northern Isles, particularly on Fair Isle where 59 individuals were recorded in September and October 1962 (Davis 1964). Over 100 were involved in the 1982/83 influx, about three-quarters being found in England (Catley & Hursthouse 1985). Many lingered and a pair bred in Norfolk in both 1984 and 1985, other pairs probably breeding in Yorkshire in 1983, and Suffolk in 1984 and 1985. Nightingale & Allsopp (1991b) provided a summary account

of the winter 1990/91 irruption, during which records of about 270 birds were accepted in Britain (Rogers *et al.* 1993).

Winter 1995/96 saw a wholly unprecedented irruption of Arctic Redpolls *Carduelis hornemanni* of the race *exilipes*, when individuals and flocks consorted with exceptionally large numbers of Common ('Mealy') Redpolls *C. flammea* of the nominate race, both presumably from northern Eurasia (Riddington *et al.* 2000). The influx of Arctic Redpolls, over 430 in total and spread across 38 British counties, far exceeded that in any previous year and the overall numbers constitute more than half the total yet recorded in these islands.

The year 1968 saw what remains a unique event – an influx of Nutcrackers *Nucifraga caryocatactes*. Hollyer (1970) detailed the records of some 315 birds which were found in Britain in autumn 1968 (all but five of these in England) and by the end of 1969, a total of 341–344 had been found in the country. The total was some five times the sum of all previous records in Britain & Ireland.

Rough-legged Buzzards *Buteo lagopus* have appeared in particularly large numbers on at least five occasions in the last 100 years: in 1966/67 (Scott 1968), 1973/74 and 1974/75 (Scott 1978), 1994 (Nightingale & Allsopp 1995) and 1998/99 (Fraser *et al.* 2000). In all instances, the birds were most often found in the eastern and southeastern counties of England, the influx of some 210–250 in October 1974 forming part of the largest on record. A remarkable 45 birds, including 11 in one group, were observed arriving in from the sea in a 4.5-hour period at Minsmere, Suffolk, on 22nd October 1974. An estimated 85–100 birds subsequently overwintered and there was a remarkable gathering of 12 at Winterton, Norfolk, on 1st May 1975. The gathering included a displaying pair which remained in the area until at least 15th May. Single birds may have also summered both here and in Wiltshire and three at Caistor, Lincolnshire, were observed carrying sticks and displaying in mid April 1975.

#### Commoner species

Irruptions involving species which are normally more widespread and numerous also occur, but perhaps as these are less obvious than those involving rarer species, they may be more frequent than records suggest. Irruptive movements of Eurasian Jays *Garrulus glandarius* have

long been known, for example, and as several birds have been identified as being of the nominate form and many others have been observed arriving over the sea, it seems likely that some have been of continental origin (e.g. Ticehurst 1910, Harrison 1948). John & Roskell (1985) provided a comprehensive account of the exceptionally large movement of late September and October 1983. Increased numbers were widely reported from Perthshire in the north to Kent in the southeast and Cornwall in the southwest, where the largest numbers were reported. In Cornwall, about 2,000 Jays were around or moving north over Housel Bay on 15th October and 800 were found here in a single field. On 17th October, 1,800 moved west at Kenidjack Valley and an observer at nearby Sennen estimated that 1,500 passed through his garden during the day. In Devon on the same day, an estimated 3,000 flew over Plymouth. The birds involved were believed to be of both British and continental origin and the movement triggered by a widespread failure of the autumn acorn crop.

Apparent irruptions of tits also occur with some regularity and Ticehurst's (1911a) note of the 1910 'immigration' provided the first confirmation of the involvement of Great Tits *Parus*

major of the nominate race in such irruptions (Ticehurst 1911a). Many of the apparent tit irruptions appear to have been in evidence over rather limited geographical ranges – notably near the coast in the eastern coastal counties – but the irruption following the 1957 breeding season was widely observed. In mid September, large numbers of Blue *Cyanistes caeruleus* and Great Tits and rather fewer Coal Tits *Periparus ater* appeared along almost the entire English south and east coasts. Blue and Great Tits from northwest Europe were involved in the irruption, part of a more general west to southwest movement across the continent, but birds of the normally rather sedentary 'British' forms also appeared to move much farther than usual. Interestingly, the irruption of tits appeared to be a behavioural response to large numbers of birds surviving the mild 1956/57 winter, well before food shortages forced the movement. A shortage of acorns in the same autumn may have caused Jays to move, for much larger than usual numbers were also reported in Britain & Ireland and in adjacent continental countries in 1957 (Cramp *et al.* 1960).

'Northern Bullfinches' *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* have often been reported in small numbers in Britain & Ireland, principally from



107. Red-backed Shrikes *Lanius collurio* at a nest at Hickling, Norfolk, in 1943. Documenting the colonisations or recolonisations has always been easier than mapping extinctions, and the loss of breeding species has been less thoroughly documented in *BB* than the arrival of new species.

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Orkney and Shetland, but an unprecedented arrival in autumn 1994 saw about 1,000 birds in Britain, with about half of these in Shetland (Nightingale & Allsopp 1995). Numbers were completely eclipsed ten years later, however, when a conservative estimate of some 4,000 appeared in autumn 2004, the largest recorded influx to Britain & Ireland by far (Pennington & Meek 2006). Among some exceptional October counts were those of 140 on Fair Isle on 27th, 125 on Unst on 20th, 70 on Foula on 24th, 85 in the Outer Hebrides on 16th and 22 at Flamborough on 17th. Several birds were recorded in Ireland – a significant addition to the sole previous Irish record, in 1964.

### *Colonisations and extinctions*

Unsurprisingly, there has often been considerable celebration among ornithologists on the return to Britain & Ireland of once-regular breeders which have been absent for a long period. The return of Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* in 1911 (Turner 1911), Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* in 1934 (Morley 1939; Morely & Price 1956; Cottier & Lea 1969), Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* in 1947 (Brown & Lynn-Allen 1948; Brown 1949; Cadbury & Olney 1978), Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* in 1954 (Sandeman 1957), Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinoides* in 1960 (Pitt 1967; Axell & Jobson 1972), Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* regularly again since 1963 (Cottier & Lea 1969), Black Tern in 1966 (Cottier & Lea 1969) and Common Crane *Grus grus* in 1981 (Spencer *et al.* 1991) have each been well documented in *BB*.

### *First attempts and colonisations*

There also tends to be great public interest and excitement when a scarce species breeds in Britain & Ireland, especially those nesting for the first time or those which are particularly charismatic. The successful breeding attempts by Snowy Owls *Bubo scandiacus* on Fetlar, Shetland, from 1967 to 1975 (Tulloch 1968; Robinson & Becker 1986), Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus* at Holme, Norfolk, in 1987 and European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster* at Bishop Middleham, Co. Durham, in 2002 attracted so many thousands of visitors that each became an event in its own right. Several other species have bred in Britain & Ireland for the first time in the last 100 years and the events surrounding their attempts have been well documented in *BB* (Appendix 2). The majority,

however, have bred just once or in only a short run of years; have bred only occasionally; or, while managing to sustain a regular breeding population, have remained rare breeding birds, often confined to a limited geographical area. Since 1973, *BB* has published the annual report of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, which provides a regular comprehensive UK overview and summary of the breeding status of these species.

Four species, however, have gone on to breed in significant numbers, each with at least several hundreds of pairs now breeding over a wide geographical area. The events surrounding these colonisations have been exceptionally well documented in *BB*.

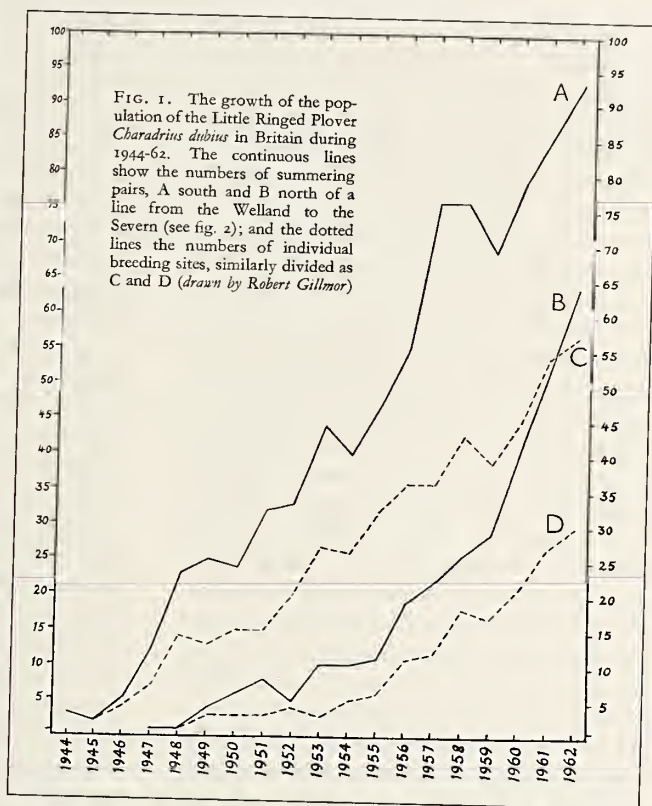
#### *Little Ringed Plover*

Although the early issues of *BB* contained several reports of Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius*, it was with evident amazement that Ledlie & Pedler (1938) reported the first breeding attempt in Britain, in 1938, 'the successful propagation of their species within 35 miles of the Metropolis, on the first attempt known to man on British soil, must be a matter for rejoicing... That the birds should have chosen for their adventure the neighbourhood of Tring seems to us in keeping with the highest traditions of ornithology, for it may be stated with little fear of contradiction that no part of England has been blessed with a finer inheritance.' The species bred again in 1944 and has done so annually ever since. There were an estimated 29 pairs by 1950, 158 in 1962, 223–230 in 1967, 467–477 in 1973, and 602–635 in 1984. The most recent population estimate for Britain and Ireland is of 763–1,008 breeding pairs (Gibbons *et al.* 1993). While most birds still breed in central and southern England, the first nests were found in Scotland in 1968 (in Lanarkshire), in Wales in 1970 (in Flintshire), and in Ireland in 2006 (in Co. Cork).

#### *Collared Dove*

The colonisation of Britain & Ireland by the Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* was much reported, with Sharrock (1976) describing it as 'one of the most dramatic events witnessed by present-day ornithologists.' Richardson *et al.* (1957) reported how they came across breeding pairs in Cromer and Overstrand in Norfolk in 1956, later discovering that they had bred suc-

cessfully at Cromer in the previous year. Birds bred in Norfolk, Lincolnshire, Kent and Morayshire in 1957 and the species' subsequent spread was exceptionally rapid (Hudson 1965, 1972), breeding having occurred in Ireland by 1959, Wales by 1961, as far west as Co. Mayo in 1964 and as far north as mainland Shetland by 1965. By 1964, just over ten years after the first accepted record, there was an estimated minimum population of some 18,855 individuals in Britain & Ireland, with proven breeding in 75 counties (see Hudson 1965). The species' expansion northwestwards across Europe in the 1930s and 1940s had already been documented in *BB* by Fisher (1953). Interestingly, what must surely have been the first British record of a Collared Dove, a territorial bird at Manton, Lincolnshire, in 1952 was never accepted as it was thought possible that the bird could have escaped from a Pontefract dealer based some 32 miles away in Yorkshire (May & Fisher 1953).



**Fig. 5.** The increase in the breeding population of Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius* in Britain between 1944 and 1962 is clearly charted in this graph, drawn by Robert Gillmor and reproduced from E. R. Parrinder's paper on 'Little Ringed Plovers in Britain during 1960-62' (Parrinder 1964).



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**108.** Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius* first bred in Britain at Tring, Hertfordshire, in 1938. The species has subsequently spread widely throughout England, and there may now be more than 1,000 pairs nesting in Britain & Ireland. This bird was photographed at Chingford, Essex, in 1951.



*Cetti's Warbler*

Another remarkable colonisation fully documented in *BB* concerned the Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*. Suffern & Ferguson-Lees (1964) reported the first bird – a singing male at Titchfield Haven, Hampshire – in spring 1961, an addition (once accepted) to the British List following hot on the heels of the species' removal from the list, along with other Hastings Rarities, in 1962 (Nicholson & Ferguson-Lees 1962). By 1970, there had been a further five records in Britain & Ireland but an influx began in 1971, when birds bred in Kent in 1973 (and quite possibly in 1972), and records ceased to be considered by BBRC by the end of 1976, when there were some 80 singing males in eight English counties! The species' northwards spread across Europe was also charted in *BB* (Bonham & Robertson 1975) and numbers have increased steadily in Britain & Ireland, despite a considerable setback during the cold 1984/85 and 1985/86 winters. There were 519–574 singing males at 166 sites in 26 counties in the UK in 1996, the year of the last full census, with two-thirds of the total in the English counties of Hampshire, Dorset, Devon and Somerset (Wotton *et al.* 1998).

*Little Egret*

A more recent colonisation has been that by the Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*. Prior to 1950, there had been records of just nine birds in England, three in Wales and one in Ireland. The first was found in Scotland in 1954. Thereafter, records increased rapidly, mainly of birds in spring, but in 1989 there was an unprecedented influx of 40 birds in autumn (Combridge & Parr 1992). An amazing 88 were reported in 1990, the year in which BBRC ceased, understandably, to consider records. Numbers have been monitored by the Wetland Bird Survey since the early 1990s, and Musgrove (2002) estimated that Britain held 1,610 birds in September 1999, with 93% of these in England, and a remarkable 40% of the total occurring between Swanage Bay in Dorset and Pagham Harbour, Sussex. Little Egrets are now familiar to all who birdwatch in the south and east of England, with substantial numbers gathering at communal evening roosts, perhaps most famously at the Thorney Island Great Deeps roost in Sussex, where 281 were reported in 1999. Lock & Cook (1998) reported the northwards and westwards spread across France, suggesting that the increase in

numbers in Britain resulted from the post-breeding dispersal of birds from colonies in northwest France. Breeding activity was confirmed for the first time in 1996, when one pair raised three young on Brownsea Island, Dorset, and a pair raised two young in Cornwall. This colony alone held 48 pairs by 2000 and others have become established with regularity ever since. Given the species' catholic choice of wetland breeding and feeding habitats, its rapid spread looks set to continue.

*Extinctions*

While the first breeding attempts by all of these species have attracted considerable attention, the cessation of regular breeding by others has been much less assiduously reported. The contrast in treatment given to the loss of Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* as a regular breeder (barely a mention) with the gain of Little Ringed Plover (several detailed papers documenting all known events) is typical. The loss of White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* as a breeding species also received scant mention in *BB* (though Jourdain (1911) reported extinction in Ireland). In addition, limited reporting on the eventual cessation of regular breeding by Wrynecks or Red-backed Shrikes contrasts with detailed coverage of the first records and subsequent colonisation by Cetti's Warblers and Mediterranean Gulls *Larus melanocephalus*. This apparent inequality of treatment almost certainly owes much to uncertainty, at the time, that an apparent final attempt or final observation really was the last, and also to the fact that by the time the ornithological community could be certain, the information had ceased to be newsworthy. Furthermore, while colonisation tends to be a sudden, if long-anticipated event, national extinction, in Britain & Ireland at least, tends to be the end point of some prolonged demise. Rather curiously, *BB* has not been at the forefront of documenting the inexorable decline of many of these species, though there have been some notable exceptions, including the decline of the Corn Crake *Crex crex* (Alexander 1914; Norris 1945, 1947; Hudson *et al.* 1990), Eurasian Bittern (Day & Wilson 1978) and Corn Bunting (Donald *et al.* 1994).

*The human impact*

*BB* has included innumerable references to the deaths of large numbers of birds as a consequence of human activities. Events such as the

wrecking of the oil tankers *Torrey Canyon* in 1967, *Amoco Cadiz* in 1978 and *Erika* in 1999, all in the English Channel or Southwest Approaches, *Esso Bernicia* in 1978 and *Braer* in 1993, both in Shetland, and *Sea Empress* in Pembrokeshire in 1996, also attracted much attention from the general media. Yet for the most part, their short-term effects were rather localised and their medium-term effects on birds at the population level have been difficult to discern. Such has not been the case with the effects of agriculture on farmland birds, which have steadily declined in numbers as farmland management has become ever more intensive. The decline, though profound in many species, has been rather gradual, taking place over a period of 30 years or more (see Shrubb (2003) for an historical perspective on the effects of farming on birds). One particular facet of farmland management, however, affected large numbers of birds over a wide geographical area, and over a sufficiently short span of time as to constitute an event.

#### *Persistent organochlorine pesticides*

Ratcliffe's (1958) paper on 'Broken eggs in Peregrine eyries' must surely have set alarm bells ringing. He had observed that the number of Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* eyries in the early 1950s 'in which one or more eggs were broken or disappeared, with no evidence of human or other outside interference' was 'a larger number than could be explained by chance accidents alone'. He reported that 'having considered the evidence and the alternative explanations, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the majority of these broken eggs were eaten by one or other of the owners. Should this prove to be the correct explanation, the reason for this peculiar behaviour is even more obscure.' His speculation that 'perhaps this note will draw records of similar experiences from other observers' was unfortunately correct. Treleven (1961), for example, noted that there had been 'a sharp decline in the effective breeding' of the Peregrine Falcon in Cornwall, with few territories occupied and limited productivity in those that were. He remarked that 'the reason for this is still obscure, but there is an excess of females in the population and this seems to be a factor of some significance, which certainly requires further investigation.'

A clue to the cause of the calamity was given a few pages later, in a review of 'Report No. 1 of

the Committee on Toxic Chemicals' by Campbell (1961). Writing that 'In the circumstances, readers will not expect the detached and objective viewpoint which should distinguish a scientific review', he noted that the report provided 'the first absolutely hard evidence that certain chemical seed dressings are responsible for the widespread deaths amongst birds which have been observed during the past five years. For the first time, chemical analysis undertaken by a London firm of public analysts and consulting chemists has isolated lethal amounts of organic chlorine in the organs of birds found dead in areas where seed dressings containing it are known to have been used. Hitherto this has been the missing link... The admitted difficulty and expense of detecting small amounts of lethal chemicals in a post mortem has been wonderfully convenient for those who, for various reasons, wish to take no action or to take it very slowly.' The report detailed the widespread deaths of mostly granivorous and seed-eating species but also referred to the potential for cumulative and indirect effects, notably on the reproduction of birds carrying sub-lethal doses of the chemicals. The review of the Committee's second report (Cornwallis 1962) started 'Murder will out. For several years many people, some of them officials who ought to have known better, have denied that the increasing use of a growing variety of chemicals in agriculture is the cause of need for concern about its effects on wild life. This report should remove any complacency that may still linger in their minds.' The report provided 'the first direct evidence of the secondary poisoning that had previously been suspected but not proved'. The effects of the chemicals on raptors were especially striking. Cramp (1963) reported that the general decline of raptors became marked by the late 1950s, becoming first apparent in the Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* about 1955, in Common Kestrel *F. tinnunculus* about 1956 and in other raptors, including the Peregrine Falcon in 1955–56. He added that the county bird reports for 1960 and 1961 suggest, among massive raptor losses, that 'the Sparrowhawk may now be virtually extinct in Lincolnshire, Huntingdonshire and Norfolk.' Newton (1986) subsequently added that 'little detail is available on the decline... because most observers noticed it only after it happened.' The effects, however, once noticed, were nevertheless dramatic and remained obvious for a very pro-



tracted period. Newton (1986), for example, reported that 'for the intensely arable region embracing south Lincolnshire, Huntingdonshire and most of Cambridgeshire, I was unable to trace any record of a nest for a period of 20 years following the decline.' Ratcliffe (1980) recalled that 'by the end of June 1961 it was clear that the British Peregrine Falcon was in dire trouble' and that by 1963, the national population was about 44% of the average level for the period 1930–39. Population recovery of this species took place sometime between the 1981 and 1991 national surveys (Crick & Ratcliffe 1995). Several other raptors were similarly badly affected.

The reviews and papers published in *BB* not only kept readers informed of a rapidly changing situation, but they helped to convince Government that 'contamination of the environment and associated bird populations is general in Great Britain' (Ratcliffe 1965), that 'the increased use of toxic chemicals, especially the persistent chlorinated hydrocarbons, which both kill directly and have sub-lethal effects on fertility, is the major factor in the recent decline of some of our birds of prey' (Cramp 1963) and that 'if present trends continue, some species could be faced with extinction' (Cramp 1963) and, ultimately, that the toxic chemicals should be withdrawn from use. The use of the various pesticides did become progressively more restricted, following the first, voluntary, bans (partial in autumn, complete in spring) on the use of aldrin, dieldrin and heptachlor as cereal seed-dressings in late 1961 and raptor numbers have gradually recovered as a result. Ratcliffe (1980) and Newton (1986) each provided engrossing and comprehensive historical accounts of the 'Pesticide Story' in their monographs on the Peregrine and Sparrowhawk, respectively.

### Climate change

Our wild birds have largely recovered from the effects of the agrochemicals applied in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s but there are worrying indications that we may be on the verge of a yet more catastrophic event. Moss (1998) reviewed the potential impact of global climate change on wild birds and provided a good indication of the sort of changes we may expect over the coming decades. The regular 'News and comment' and 'Conservation research news' pages in *BB* have already reported some alarming incidents, such

as the near-total breeding failures among seabirds in widespread parts of Britain during the last few years. Shetland seabirds were apparently the first to be affected, in 1988, and have continued to suffer periodically ever since (see, for example, Heubeck (2002) for studies of Kittiwakes on Shetland). Most recently, there were marked breeding failures here in 2001, 2003 and 2004, with Kittiwakes, Arctic Terns, Arctic and Great Skuas and Common Guillemots being especially badly affected and in 2004 the 'melt-down' extended to Orkney and the Isle of May. While Shetland seabirds fared better in 2005, Puffins on St Kilda had their worst recorded breeding season ever, and 2006 saw failures in Kittiwake colonies southwest to Cornwall and Scilly. Some seabird colonies now contain a fraction of the numbers of birds they held a few decades previously and several species, including Herring Gull *L. argentatus*, Arctic Skua and Arctic Tern are in steep national decline. Whether the breeding failures and population declines result from overfishing of certain favoured prey species or are due to a shift in the distribution of the prey as ocean temperatures increase, or some combination of both effects, it is a direct result of human intervention. We should expect further breeding-season failures. It will be a tragedy of the first order if our nations are to lose the internationally important breeding seabird assemblages for which they are justifiably famous. And, unless action to halt warming is taken now, it will be the grim task of *BB* to document those events with the meticulous detail and authority we have come to expect of the journal.

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## Appendix 1. Some of the major bird movements and influxes of scarcer species in the last 100 years to have been documented in *British Birds*.

Year	Event	Reference
1920	Influx of about 24 Glossy Ibises <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i> including ten at Marazion, Cornwall on 19th September	Boyd (1920)
1937	An influx of divers and grebes in January and February	Alexander (1937); Witherby (1937)
1945	Influx of Black-winged Stilts <i>Himantopus himantopus</i> , with ten at Bovisand, Devon, on 10th May, and breeding by three pairs, two successfully, in Nottinghamshire	Fitter <i>et al.</i> (1945); Staton (1945)
1946	Exceptional autumn passage of Curlew Sandpipers <i>Calidris ferruginea</i> and Little Stints <i>C. minuta</i>	Gibb & Tucker (1947)
1948	Spring Hoopoe <i>Upupa epops</i> influx, with successful breeding in Kent	Nevin (1950)
	Large passage of Little Auks <i>Alle alle</i>	The editors (1949)
1950	Spring Hoopoe influx	The editors (1951)
1952	Large numbers of Wood Sandpipers <i>Tringa glareola</i> on autumn passage	Nisbet (1956)
	Large autumn Firecrest influx <i>Regulus ignicapilla</i> , overwintering and a spring 1953 influx	Redman & Hooke (1954)
1953	Exceptional autumn passage of Little Stints, Curlew Sandpipers and Ruff <i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	Nisbet & Vine (1956)
	A 'phenomenal invasion' of Lapland Buntings <i>Calcarius lapponicus</i> in autumn	Williamson & Davis (1956)

# One hundred years of notable avian events in British Birds

- First large passage of Balearic Shearwaters *Puffinus mauretanicus* noted off Portland, Dorset Ash & Cooke (1954)
- 1954 Two large influxes of Bewick's Swans *Cygnus columbianus* in winters 1954/55 and 1955/56, after which regular wintering in large numbers became the norm Nisbet (1959); Ogilvie (1969)
- 1959 Influx of Curlew Sandpipers, including at least 200 at Holbeach, Lincolnshire, on 5th–6th September 1959 Ferguson-Lees & Williamson (1959)
- 1960 A 'huge and unprecedented invasion' of Little Stints, including 311 at Frodsham, Cheshire, on 22nd September Ferguson-Lees & Williamson (1960)
- 1963 Unprecedented Common Crane *Grus grus* influx with 500–700 birds in England in October Ferguson-Lees (1964); Harber (1964)
- 1965 Influx of Hoopoes, with 40 in Ireland and a flock of seven on St Agnes, Scilly, on 29th March Ferguson-Lees (1965)
- Unprecedented movements of shearwaters (mainly Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*) in British and Irish waters in September, with at least 5,000 past Cape Clear, Co. Cork, on both 14th and 15th Newell (1968)
- 1968 Record influx of Hoopoes Ferguson-Lees & Sharrock (1968)
- 1969 Unprecedented autumn influx of Curlew Sandpipers Stanley & Minton (1972)
- Unprecedented influx of 'northern gulls' on Fair Isle (with 5,000 Great Black-backed *Larus marinus*, 8,000 Herring *L. argentatus* and 300 Glaucous Gulls *L. hyperboreus* on 25th November) Bonham & Sharrock (1969)
- 1970 Large influx of southern herons in spring Bonham (1970)
- 1971 Hoopoe influx in spring Bonham (1971)
- 1973 Huge influx of Great Shearwaters with 4,487 past Cape Clear on 3rd September Ogilvie (1976)
- 1975 Large influx of Long-eared Owls *Asio otus* in winter 1975/76 Christie (1976)
- 1978 Large passage of Sooty Shearwaters *Puffinus griseus* Madge & Allsopp (1978)
- 1982 Autumn Common Crane influx, involving about 200 birds, mainly in Kent McMinn (1983)
- Autumn influx of Pallas's Leaf Warblers *Phylloscopus proregulus* Howie & Bell (1985)
- 1985 Large arrival of Yellow-browed Warblers *Phylloscopus inornatus* in October Baker & Catley (1987)
- Large passage of Pomarine Skuas *Stercorarius pomarinus* along east coast in October and November Fox & Aspinall (1987)
- Large influx of Curlew Sandpipers Dawson & Allsopp (1986)
- 1988 Influx of Curlew Sandpipers in August and September Kirby *et al.* (1989)
- Unprecedented autumn Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus* passage Dunn & Hirschfeld (1991)
- Large influx of Yellow-browed Warblers Elkins (1991)
- 1989 Exceptional Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* influx Spencer *et al.* (1991)
- 1990 Exceptional November & December Little Auk passage off North Sea coasts Nightingale & Allsopp (1991b)
- Exceptional influx of Yellow-browed Warblers Allsopp & Nightingale (1991)
- Exceptional Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* influx Nightingale & Allsopp (1991a)
- 1991 Unprecedented influx of Long-tailed Skuas into North Sea in September, with 485 past Flamborough on 19th Allsopp & Nightingale (1992)
- Large passage of Great Shearwaters off south-western coasts Allsopp & Nightingale (1992)
- Large passage of Pomarine Skuas and Little Auks off east coast Allsopp & Nightingale (1992)
- Exceptional inland Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* passage across southern Britain Kramer 1995
- 1992 'Tremendous' passage of Black Terns *Chlidonias niger* in September with 10,125 past Dungeness on 11th September Nightingale & Allsopp (1993)
- Exceptional passage of Pomarine Skuas off Cumbria, North Uist and Shetland (with 2,093 past Wats Ness on 9th May) in spring Nightingale & Allsopp (1993)
- and off northeastern England in autumn (with 1,090 past Seaton Carew, Cleveland, on 9th October)



1993	Exceptional passage of 1,253 Long-tailed Skuas past Aird an Runair, North Uist, on 18th May Record influx of Iceland Gulls <i>Larus glaucoideus</i>	Dawson & Allsopp (1994) Dawson & Allsopp (1994)
1994	Unprecedented influx of Golden Orioles <i>Oriolus oriolus</i> in spring, Richard's Pipits <i>Anthus richardi</i> in September and October and Pallas's Leaf Warblers in October and November	Nightingale & Allsopp (1995)
1995	Huge passage of Little Auks in both winter periods, with 10,947 past Flamborough on 11th January	Nightingale & Allsopp (1996)
1996	Exceptional autumn influx of Little Stints Exceptional autumn influx of Firecrests	Nightingale & Allsopp (1997) Nightingale & Allsopp (1997)
1997	Influx of Smew <i>Mergellus albellus</i> during winter 1996/97 Exceptionally large inland passage of Black Terns on 3rd May Unprecedented European Bee-eater <i>Merops apiaster</i> influx in May Record influx of Pallas's Leaf Warblers	Nightingale & Allsopp (1998) Nightingale & Allsopp (1998) Nightingale & Allsopp (1998) Nightingale & Allsopp (1998)
1998	Exceptionally strong inland passage of Arctic Terns in May Largest-ever passage of Cory's Shearwaters <i>Calonectris diomedea</i> past Cornwall, with 3,000 past Porthgwarra on 5th September and high numbers elsewhere Exceptional autumn passage of Little Stints and Curlew Sandpipers	Nightingale (1999) Nightingale (1999) Nightingale (1999)
1999	Strong autumn influx of Curlew Sandpipers Large Great Shearwater passage off Ireland and southwest England	Nightingale & Elkins (2000) Nightingale & Elkins (2000)
2000	Unprecedented September influx of Honey-buzzards <i>Pernis apivorus</i>	Fraser & Rogers (2002)
2001	Exceptional Little Auk movements off North Sea coasts in November	Nightingale & McGeehan (2002a)
2002	Unprecedented spring influx of Rose-coloured Starlings <i>Sturnus roseus</i> Huge passage of Sooty Shearwaters along North Sea coasts, with 2,674 off Flamborough on 22nd September	Fraser & Rogers (2004) Nightingale & McGeehan (2002b)
2003	Record influx of Pectoral Sandpipers <i>Calidris melanotos</i>  Unprecedented influx of Pallas's Leaf Warblers Record influx of Yellow-browed Warblers Huge Little Auk passage in January, with 9,822 off Flamborough, East Yorkshire, on 31st	Lees & Gilroy (2004); Fraser & Rogers (2006) Elkins (2005); Fraser & Rogers (2006) Elkins (2005); Fraser & Rogers (2006) Nightingale & McGeehan (2003)
2004	Huge North Sea Little Auk passage with 10,625 past Farne Islands, Northumberland, on 18th November	Nightingale & McGeehan (2005)
2005	Huge numbers of Sooty Shearwaters passed North Sea coasts in September, with 2,721 past Flamborough on 16th September By far the largest influx of Yellow-browed Warblers yet	Nightingale & McGeehan (2005) Nightingale & McGeehan (2005)

## Appendix 2. Year of first proven breeding of species in Britain & Ireland since the launch of *British Birds*.

Year	Species	Country/Region/ County	Current status	Key <i>British Birds</i> references
1908	Slavonian Grebe <i>Podiceps auritus</i>	Inverness-shire	Regular but rare	Witherby (1910)
1920	Brambling <i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	Sutherland	Occasional	Jourdain (1921)
1923	Black Redstart <i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	Sussex	Regular but rare	Coward (1924); Fitter (1965, 1971, 1976)
1932	Redwing <i>Turdus iliacus</i>	Morayshire	Regular but rare	Daukes (1932)
1934	Temminck's Stint <i>Calidris temminckii</i>	Cairngorms	Regular but rare	Edwards (1935)
1938	Little Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius dubius</i>	Hertfordshire	Regular, widespread and numerous	Ledlie & Pedler (1938); Parrinder (1954, 1960, 1964); Parrinder & Parrinder (1969, 1975)

One hundred years of notable avian events in *British Birds*

1945	Black-winged Stilt <i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	Nottinghamshire	Occasional	Staton (1945)
1950	Gull-billed Tern <i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	Essex	Occasional	Pyman & Wainwright (1952)
1955	Collared Dove <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Norfolk	Regular, widespread and numerous	Richardson <i>et al.</i> (1957); Hudson (1965)
1955	European Bee-eater <i>Merops apiaster</i>	Sussex	Occasional	n/a
1959	Green Sandpiper <i>Tringa ochropus</i>	Inverness-shire	Occasional	Clifton (1959)
1959	Wood Sandpiper <i>Tringa glareola</i>	Sutherland	Regular but rare	Sharrock (1968)
1962	Firecrest <i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	Hampshire	Regular and widespread	Adams (1966); Batten (1973)
1967	Snowy Owl <i>Bubo scandiacus</i>	Shetland	Occasional	Tulloch (1968); Robinson & Becker (1986)
1967	Fieldfare <i>Turdus pilaris</i>	Orkney	Occasional	Balfour (1968)
1967	European Serin <i>Serinus serinus</i>	Dorset	Regular but rare	Ferguson-Lees (1968)
1968	Mediterranean Gull <i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	Hampshire	Regular but rare	Taverner (1970, 1972)
1968	Bluethroat <i>Luscinia svecica</i>	Inverness-shire	Occasional	Greenwood (1968)
1970	Great Northern Diver <i>Gavia immer</i>	Wester Ross	Occasional	The editors (1971)
1970	Common Goldeneye* <i>Bucephala clangula</i>	Inverness-shire	Regular but rare	The editors (1971)
1973	Cetti's Warbler <i>Cettia cetti</i>	Kent	Regular, widespread and numerous	Harvey (1977)
1975	Spotted Sandpiper <i>Actitis macularius</i>	Skye	Occasional	Wilson (1976)
1975	Little Gull <i>Larus minutus</i>	Cambridgeshire/Norfolk	Occasional	Carson <i>et al.</i> (1977)
1977	Shore Lark <i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	Scotland (north and west)	Occasional	Watson (1973)
1977	Lapland Bunting <i>Calcarius lapponicus</i>	Scotland	Occasional	Cummings (1979)
1978	Purple Sandpiper <i>Calidris maritima</i>	Scotland (north and west)	Regular but rare	Dennis (1983)
1982	Common Rosefinch <i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>	Scotland (north and west)	Occasional	Mullins (1984)
1984	Little Bittern <i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	Yorkshire	Occasional	Allport & Carroll (1989)
1984	Parrot Crossbill <i>Loxia pytyopsittacus</i>	Norfolk	Occasional	Catley & Hursthouse (1985)
1988	Red-necked Grebe <i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	Cambridgeshire & Scotland	Occasional	Parslow-Otsu & Elliott (1991)
1992	Icterine Warbler <i>Hippolais icterina</i>	Scotland	Occasional	Ogilvie <i>et al.</i> (1995)

\* Note that breeding Common Goldeneyes *Bucephala clangula* in Cheshire in 1931 and 1932 are thought to have been escaped birds and are excluded from this table.



# Letters

## Buff-bellied Pipits in Europe

The second part of the 'Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2005' (*Brit. Birds* 100: 72–104) included some interesting thoughts on the occurrence of a Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens* of the nominate race in Lincolnshire. It was suggested that this and other such individuals might have arrived from east Greenland and Iceland with Meadow Pipits *A. pratensis*, and also that the rather distinctive call-note of Buff-bellied is key to its detection. With these points in mind, the following comments by two of the pioneer students of bird migration may be of some relevance.

Heinrich Gätké (1895) documented the first European record, on Helgoland, Germany on 6th November 1851, noting that it 'was shot...

by a native gunner, whose attention was attracted by the... unknown call-note'; while of the first for Britain, on St Kilda on 30th September 1910, William Eagle Clarke (1912) wrote 'It is doubtful if we should have detected it... among the numerous Meadow-Pipits, if its unfamiliar note had not attracted our attention.'

### References

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**EDITORIAL COMMENT** Chris Kehoe has commented: 'The rather distinctive call of *A. r. rubescens* is described in detail (and illustrated with sonograms) in Alström & Mild (2003), who stated: "The usual call of the nominate subspecies, which is mainly given in flight, is a short, sharp, high-pitched and somewhat squeaky *tseep* or *seep*. It is often doubled or repeated several times in quick succession. ...most similar to the typical flight call of Meadow Pipit, but sounds clearly sharper, squeakier and more explosive. Sonograms differ markedly from those of Meadow Pipit in (e.g.) broader frequency range, descending pitch and in having harmonics." By comparison, the call of the Asian subspecies *japonicus* (yet to occur in Britain but recorded regularly in Israel in winter and a likely vagrant) is less distinct, being described as "extremely similar to Meadow Pipit (in fact closer to Meadow Pipit than to *rubescens*...)"

'While call may allow for the detection of *rubescens* (Paul Holt famously found a Buff-bellied Pipit on St Agnes, Scilly, in September 1996 by recognising its call; *Birding World* 9: 390–391, *Brit. Birds* 90: 494), it is unlikely to help birders to find Britain's first *japonicus*, although anyone confronted by a vagrant Buff-bellied Pipit would be well advised to pay very close attention to call and obtain sound recordings if possible.'

## The status of 'Coues's Redpoll' in Britain

I very much enjoyed Ian Wallace's illuminating status summaries in Parts 1 and 2 of the recently published 'Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2005' (*Brit. Birds* 100: 16–61, 72–104). I must, however, take issue with his account in Part 2 (*Brit. Birds* 100: 96) of the emerging status of Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemannii* of the race *exilipes* ('Coues's Redpoll') in Britain. In documenting their increasingly observed presence, he rightly refers to the large-scale 'invasion' of 1995/96 but makes no mention of the, at the time, equally

unprecedented arrivals in the autumn/winter of 1984/85 and 1990/91. The latter influx produced England's largest flock to date, close to what was then my home, in Norwich.

More puzzlingly, he cites as though it were noteworthy the referral to *exilipes* of single redpolls on Fair Isle, Shetland, in 1993. However, the birds of 1990/91 (and indeed those of 1984/85) were all so self-evidently of this form (by virtue both of their appearance and of the accompanying hordes of Scandinavian Common Redpolls *C. flammea flammea*) that

their subspecific identity hardly seemed to require particular emphasis at the time. Furthermore, the 1991 BBRC Report (*Brit. Birds* 85: 549) assigned them correctly to *exilipes* and

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thereby corrects the misleading impression now being given that we were not confidently finding and identifying this form until 1993.

## The Raso Lark

Donald & Brooke (2006) appear to have misunderstood what I said about the Raso Lark *Alauda razae* when they wrote: 'Bourne, writing of a visit in 1951, said that the birds "swarm" upon the island, and are "totally fearless".' In fact, while I saw it, I never landed on Raso, as I made clear (*Ibis* 97: 508–556), and this was in a summary of all information about the archipelago. In fact, I became interested in the status of passerines on the outlying islets because of the extraordinary abundance and tameness of the Cape Verde Sparrow *Passer iagoensis* on Cima at the other end of the group, and it would have been interesting to learn what happens where it occurs alongside the lark on Raso.

It should be stressed that not only is Raso important as the breeding place of a remarkable endemic lark, but it is also a major seabird

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colony, and holds several forms endemic to the archipelago, where they are under pressure. The effect of their guano in fertilising the vegetation, and the proliferation of associated invertebrates, may contribute to the welfare of the passerines. Past experience, notably in another comparable Macaronesian group, the Salvages, where displaced fishermen turned on the birds, suggests that the best protection for such sites is a warden – at least until the rehabilitation of Santa Luzia is completed. This devastated but potentially valuable alternative site apparently supports few birds at present and the larks might not do well without the seabirds.

### Reference

Donald, P., & Brooke, M. de L. 2006. An unlikely survivor: the peculiar natural history of the Raso Lark. *Brit. Birds* 99: 420–430.

## Common Buzzard attacking Barn Owl

The short note by Jim Bullock regarding a Barn Owl *Tyto alba* being killed and eaten by Common Buzzards *Buteo buteo* (*Brit. Birds* 99: 578) recalled a similar incident, also in March 2006, published in the Barn Owl Trust's newsletter *Feedback*, and summarised as follows.

At dusk on 5th March 2006, near Chulmleigh, Devon, James Martin and Janet Rowley spotted what looked like a bird at the side of the road and stopped their car to investigate; they found a Common Buzzard with a live Barn Owl

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in its talons. JM tried to shoo the Buzzard away, but it remained defiant, allowing a close approach; eventually, he managed to prize open the buzzard's talons and release the owl. Even when deprived of its prey, the buzzard didn't fly far and as JM returned to the car the Buzzard flew back and tried to grab the owl out of his hand! As they pulled away the Buzzard flew at the car still trying to get the owl!

The Barn Owl was successfully rehabilitated and released in the same area by a Barn Owl Trust employee.



# Reviews

## HANDBOOK OF AUSTRALIAN, NEW ZEALAND & ANTARCTIC BIRDS: VOL. 7. BOATBILL TO STARLINGS

Edited by P. J. Higgins,  
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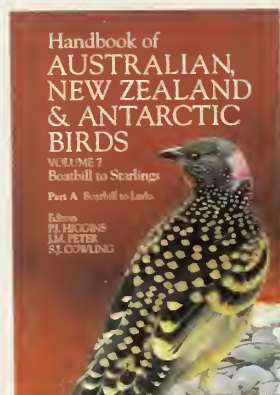
The publication of this volume, the last in the series affectionately known as *HANZAB*, brings this monumental work to a close. Like the first volume in the series, Vol. 7 is actually split into two weighty tomes (Parts A and B), each of around 1,000 pages. It covers the remaining 168 passerines, which include three endemic families, the Australian mudnesters (Corcoraciidae), the New Zealand wattlebirds (Callaeidae) and the monotypic family (Turnagridae) represented by the extinct Piopio *Turnagra capensis*.

As would be expected, the format follows that of the previous volumes, with sections covering field identification, habitat, distribution and population, movements, food, social organisation, social behaviour, voice, breeding, and plumage and morphology. If this sounds familiar, then it's not surprising as this was the format of our own *BWP*, which provided a great impetus for *HANZAB*. As well as a combined index to all seven volumes, Part B also offers what I imagine would be useful appendices of Aboriginal and Maori names.

So, what was conceived of as a four-volume work back in 1981 has finally manifested itself as nine books, published between 1990 and 2006, covering all 957 species recorded in the region. Given the almost exponential rise in published ornithological literature relating to

the region in the last 20 years, it is little wonder that, in maintaining the very high standards set by Vol. 1, the project ended up larger than envisaged at the outset. What might come as more of a surprise to readers is the similarly exponential rise in costs associated with the project, such that by the end it became a multi-million-dollar endeavour. Peter Higgins's 'Finishing *HANZAB* – a reflection' published in Part B makes for a fascinating read. Among other things it outlines the tension within the ornithological community – those determined to complete the project and those who felt that Birds Australia (formerly the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (RAOU)) was having to sink too many resources into the project at the expense of practical conservation efforts. In the end, the project survived only through sponsorship from individual benefactors, trusts and foundations, and businesses. A list of these is given.

Vol. 7 maintains the high standards that one has come to expect of this series. The plates are of very high quality and the content accurate, up to date and copious. Having recently returned from a trip to New Zealand, I was particularly interested to read about some of its endangered species. The Kokako *Callaeas cinereus* account extends to 20 pages and that for the Saddleback *Philesturnus carunculatus* to nearly 30! In both, a full account of conservation efforts extends to giving details of numbers released at all translocation sites and the subsequent success or otherwise of the population at each of these sites. Nor is it just native species that receive a full treatment. The introduced Dunnock *Prunella modularis* receives seven pages, included in which is a detailed history of its introduction and subsequent population expansion, as well as its more recent decline. Accounts of introduced species also include, where available, summaries of any ecological or biological studies of them in



the region, which may provide interesting comparisons with those in their natural range.

The aim of RAOU/Birds Australia is to work to conserve native birds and biological diversity in Australasia and Antarctica through the study and management of birds and their habitats, and the education and involvement of the community. *HANZAB* will surely provide an important baseline for delivering this aim, and prove to be an invaluable resource in helping to achieve it. It is likely to remain the key reference to birds of this region for very many years and it compares more than favourably with any similar publication available for any other region of the world. Everyone who has been connected with this project can feel proud of their achievement and should take a well-earned rest!

Whether or not *HANZAB* will find its way onto the bookshelves of many British birders is another matter. Much of the content will be of little direct relevance and it is an expensive work. Anyone who has been purchasing each volume as it has been published will have forked out over £1,000.00 by now, and I shudder to think what the cost of all seven volumes would be if starting from scratch. Those who have taken the plunge will certainly be hoping that OUP does not start selling complete sets for sweetie money, as it did with *BWP*.

Paul Harvey

## THE BARN SWALLOW

By Angela Turner.

T & AD Poyser, A&C Black,  
London, 2006. 256 pages;  
26 colour photographs;  
numerous line-drawings.

ISBN 0-7136-6558-0.

Hardback £40.00.

Following on from the author's 1994 book in the 'Hamlyn Species Guide' series, this volume provides a far more detailed and comprehensive account of the Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, including much new information from research carried out in the intervening 12 years.

Angela Turner's long interest in the Barn Swallow began with a study of its feeding behaviour in central Scotland in the 1970s, and the book is especially strong in describing behavioural aspects of the bird. Social behaviour is a major focus of several chapters, including the often complex interactions between adult birds in the breeding season, and the huge communal gatherings that are a feature of the species in autumn

and winter. One roost in Botswana was thought to contain 1–2 million birds; perhaps as many birds as return to Britain each spring, massed together in just 34 *Acacia* trees! An absorbing description of flight patterns, including the variety of different 'tactics' that birds use when in pursuit of flying insects, is drawn heavily from the author's own research.

Many readers will be familiar with studies of Barn Swallows that have investigated the role played by the male bird's long tail. Does this serve primarily to attract females or has it evolved mainly to improve manoeuvrability and hence foraging efficiency? Numerous field experiments have been carried out to try to resolve this question, including novel techniques such as artificially altering tail length and assessing the impact this has on foraging behaviour and mate selection. The book provides a detailed and balanced overview of this work, and highlights the differences of opinion that, perhaps surprisingly, still exist among scientists studying this intriguing subject.

Historically, the difference in tail length between the sexes is

something that Gilbert White was well aware of (despite the lack of optics in the 18th century). Yet he still believed that at least a proportion of our breeding birds remained with us through the winter, hiding in crevices or in mud at the bottom of ponds. Although we now know better, the chapter on migration and dispersal shows that we still have much to learn about Barn Swallow movements. As the author points out, it seems very surprising that for one of our best-loved and most common long-distance migrants, there has been only a single (Italian) study into how birds find their way to and from the wintering grounds.

A special mention must go to Danish scientist Anders Møller, whose name appears on the majority of pages making up this book. His research on Barn Swallows has spanned over 30 years and he is the lead author of no less than 86 of the papers listed in the book's bibliography! All in all, this is a fascinating account of what is known of this species, as well as being a thoroughly enjoyable read.

Ian Carter

BIRDS OF THE DOMINICAN  
REPUBLIC & HAITIBy Steven Latta, Christopher  
Rimmer, Allan Keith,  
James Wiley, Herbert Raffaele,  
Kent McFarland and  
Eladio Fernandez.Christopher Helm, A&C Black,  
London, 2006. 258 pages;  
57 colour plates;  
numerous maps.  
ISBN 0-7136-7905-0.  
Paperback, £24.99.

guide formats (Raffaele *et al.*, *Birds of the West Indies*; Helm 1998/2003), an admirable BOU checklist covering the same ground as the present work (Keith *et al.*, *The Birds of Hispaniola*; BOU, 2003) and a field guide to Cuba for good measure. Now, we have this book, a near hybrid between the BOU checklist and the West Indian guide, for it 'borrows' many plates from the latter and leans heavily on the non-descriptive texts of the former. Overkill or an embarrassment of riches?

Before I answer that question (impatient readers may cut to the final paragraph), what does the present volume contain? Following some sensibly brief but informative introductory sections, replete with a neat map that marks the island's protected areas, there follow the plates. These rely heavily on Raf-

faele *et al.*, augmented by 105 new images by Barry Kent McKay, including several full-page plates of single endemics. Thereafter come the 302 species accounts, each subdivided into 'Description', 'Similar species', 'Voice', 'Hispaniola' (which covers records, range and habitats), 'Status', 'Comments' (mainly habits), 'Nesting' (where relevant), 'Range' (global) and 'Local names'. The level of detail is nigh faultless. Taxonomy follows the AOU with a few well-argued exceptions, most radically the removal of the endemic genera *Microigea* and *Xenolgea* to Thraupidae. Except for a few vagrants and an introduction, all species are mapped. Finally, there is a solid but not exhaustive bibliography, a checklist with tick boxes and space to annotate locality, date, etc., and a really handy site guide. Most visitors can

A little over a decade ago I made my first visit to Hispaniola, armed with a copy of 'Bond' (Bond, *Birds of the West Indies*; Collins, 1985) and some birders' notes. How times have changed. Since then, a new West Indian guide has appeared in hardback and field-



dispense with those birders' notes I carried, for this section sports 'hot' tips for finding virtually all the endemics.

Billed as a field guide, this book is much heavier than the same publisher's *Field Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*. If you own the latter and the brilliant BOU checklist, then I doubt that you need this

book. If you possess neither and are planning a visit, this guide is a must, and there is enough here to warrant its purchase by owners of the general field guide alone. Nonetheless, my favourite book on Hispaniola, one of the most exciting West Indian birding destinations, remains the 1931 Wetmore & Swales tome (*Birds of*

Haiti and the Dominican Republic, *US Natl. Mus. Nat. Hist. Bull.* 155). Ornithology was different then; not only were there more birds but also more habitat, and aeroplanes did not put foreign climes within such easy reach. Times really have changed.

Guy M. Kirwan

#### TONY SOPER'S BIRD TABLE BOOK

By Tony Soper. David & Charles, Newton Abbot, 2006. 185 pages; numerous colour illustrations. ISBN 0-7153-2413-6. Hardback, £16.99.

#### THE GARDEN BIRD BOOK

By Sarah Whittley. New Holland, London, 2007. 176 pages; numerous colour illustrations. ISBN 1-84537-496-9. Hardback, £12.99.

Colourful and skilfully illustrated, these two books aim to provide

helpful advice to the many people wishing to make their gardens more attractive for birds.

Rather surprisingly, given that it is published in association with the BTO, Sarah Whittley's *The Garden Bird Book* is by far the least helpful. Just 13 of its 176 pages are allotted to practical advice, mainly on feeding and nestboxes, while most of the rest are filled with species accounts that contain rather too much information of questionable relevance. For example, space is devoted to identification hints; the mention of subspecies (*abietinus* Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* and *acredula* Willow Warbler *Ph. trochilus*) is

surely pointless; and the inclusion of White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* could be construed as padding! In contrast, the coverage provided by Tony Soper's cleverly written guide is notably more comprehensive, as it deals not only with the provision of food and nest-sites but also with a variety of other subjects, these including gardening for birds; ponds and their construction; and other wildlife. Thus, even though *Tony Soper's Bird Table Book* is more expensive, its consistently more pertinent and wide-ranging content ensures that the extra money is well spent.

Pete Combridge

#### STRONSAY'S 'GARDEN' BIRDS

By John Holloway. Published privately by the author, 2006. 304 pages; many photographs and illustrations. ISBN 0-9526298-5-2. Hardback, £28.00 (inc. p&pp from the author, Castle, Stronsay, Orkney KW17 2AG).

The style and format of *Stronsay's 'Garden' Birds* will be familiar to anyone who has read previous titles by the same author, which include *Fair Isle's Garden Birds* (Shetland Times Ltd, 1984). This, John Holloway's latest book, a series of accounts of finding and identifying birds on Stronsay, Orkney, is a veritable Northern Isles birdfest. Stronsay lies 65 km SSW of Fair Isle, and in the lee of both Sanday and North Ronaldsay, which should give an indication as to the species encountered in the

17 years that the author and his family have lived there. And a great many have been spectacular rarities too, albeit that most are not submitted to BBRC. This book is your chance to read all about them.

Separate sections are devoted to resident species, regular migrants, and to uncommon migrants and rarities. Liberally illustrated by the author's own inimitable colour sketches, some of the many photographs and video-grabs require a leap of faith in believing that they are what we are told they are, but one, of a male Cretzschmar's Bunting *Emberiza caesia* taken on a gloriously sunny late-spring day in 1998, indisputably shows it to be such. The documentation of the second successful breeding by Icterine Warblers *Hippolais icterina* in Scotland, in 2002, is another significant milestone. A final section of contributions comes from Stronsay residents and visitors (mainly concerning star finds or memorable ornithological

moments) to the private reserve run by the author and his wife, Sue.

Focused, harmless addiction maybe, but such is the contagious enthusiasm of the author that it is hardly surprising that the whole island population has got in on the act, something of which comes through in an engaging narrative. John is regularly tipped off about the rare/unusual/unidentified: a 'bird like a willy wagtail but bigger' turned out, of course, to be a Magpie *Pica pica* (the one and only record for the island) resulting in an 'island only' twitch for residents.

This book essentially celebrates the pleasure, anticipation and excitement of birdwatching on a small island and is dedicated to those 'field ornithologists who find and enjoy'. On Stronsay, as throughout the Northern and Western Isles, the potential exists to find that elusive rarity, often just a local rarity but sometimes one more significant.

John Holloway's unabated pleasure in birding his unique local patch is conveyed unequivocally throughout, and while the author may not quite be a latter-day Gilbert White, or indeed Compton

Mackenzie, this read is a serious 'Rarities Galore'. In that, this book is as much for birdwatchers' companions to read as for birders themselves. However, its true worth as a valuable documentary record

will, we suspect, not be realised until all too late, perhaps in an antiquarian bookshop 50 years hence.

Colin and Joy Glendenning

**RAPTORS: A FIELD GUIDE  
TO SURVEY AND  
MONITORING**

By Jon Hardey, Humphrey Q. P. Crick, Chris V. Wernham, Helen T. Riley, Brian Etheridge and Des B. A. Thompson.

The Stationery Office, Edinburgh, 2006. 300 pages, numerous line-drawings, including a CD of raptor vocalisations.

ISBN 0-11-497321-0.  
Hardback £14.99.

Although some raptor populations in Britain & Ireland are increasing, many are still well below the levels that would be expected were it not for past human persecution. Significant threats remain, including the continued persecution of some species, habitat deterioration and, perhaps, climate change. The need for comprehensive monitoring and reporting of birds of prey is as great as it has ever been.

This guide covers the 21 species of diurnal birds of prey (Falconiformes) and owls (Strigiformes) that breed regularly in Britain & Ireland, together with Common Raven *Corvus corax*, which many enthusiasts treat as an 'honorary raptor'. The individual species accounts provide a comprehensive summary of breeding ecology and monitoring techniques for each

species. One of the great strengths of the book is the wide input from raptor ecologists throughout Britain & Ireland (more than 100 contributors in all), so that the text not only summarises what is known from the literature but also includes knowledge gained from long hours in the field, some of which has not been published previously. Sources of information are cited throughout the text and the 32 pages of references at the end of the book provide a valuable resource for those seeking further detail. The accounts are broken down into standard headings so that there is welcome consistency of coverage among species.

Although most readers will no doubt quickly turn to the text covering their favourite species, the introductory chapters should not be overlooked. These describe the development of raptor monitoring in Britain, surveillance and monitoring techniques (including modern developments such as satellite-tracking and stable-isotope analysis), raptor breeding biology and the identification of raptor signs. There are also sections on licensing, wildlife crime and health and safety issues, which provide essential reading for anyone wishing to become involved in monitoring birds of prey.

The accompanying CD (tucked away neatly inside the back cover)

is much more than a gimmicky add-on, because of the amount of detail it contains. For each species there is a brief introduction which describes how vocal the bird is, followed by examples of different types of call, carefully introduced to make clear the sex and age of the bird involved (where known) as well as the circumstances in which the calls were made – for example alarm-calling at a human intruder close to the nest, or female responding to a male bringing in food. This makes it genuinely useful for prospective fieldworkers. If you thought that you were familiar with the sounds made by Tawny Owls *Strix aluco*, for example, then the five minutes allocated to this species might contain a few surprises!

The stated aim of this guide is to promote best practice in survey and monitoring work, and hence to improve the quality of the information collected each year by the dedicated body of enthusiasts who make up regional raptor groups or undertake their own individual studies. It is also hoped that it will help to encourage and inspire a new generation of raptor workers. Having spent an absorbing evening thumbing through the guide, with the CD playing in the background, I have little doubt that it will succeed in its aims.

Ian Carter

**A TIGER IN THE SAND:  
SELECTED WRITINGS  
ON NATURE**

By Mark Cocker.

Jonathan Cape, London, 2006.

184 pages.

ISBN 0-224-07882-5.  
Hardback, £10.00.

For many years now, I have regularly bought the *Guardian* newspaper on Mondays, mainly for one reason: to read and savour the 'Country Diary', which, this year, is celebrating its centenary. Now, this attractively produced book handily collects the cream of Mark Cocker's contributions, almost all originally published in the 'Country Diary' or a similar

column in the *Guardian Weekly*.

The various writers of this immensely popular column include a brace of ornithological luminaries from Cheshire: Thomas (T. A.) Coward, the first diarist in its original incarnation as the 'Country Lover's Diary' in the then *Manchester Guardian*, and his successor, Arnold Boyd, who was also a past editor of *British Birds*.



The author of this fine collection of articles is himself an extremely able ornithologist. He is also one of our finest contemporary writers on birds and natural history, well known to many for his last two books, the incisive and witty *Birders*, and, most recently, the unique masterpiece that is *Birds Britannica*.

A *Tiger in the Sand* deals with a huge range of wildlife subjects, from mosquitoes (Culicidae) to whales (Cetacea) (and, of course, Tigers *Panthera tigris*), and natural landscapes, from Mark's homeland of Norfolk to the Galapagos archipelago (and a whole chapter on Africa). But for those whose primary passion is birdlife, there is

much here to delight; over a third of the 101 articles have birds as their major subjects, while many more include mention of others.

In these carefully honed but vivid pieces, Mark Cocker explores the intriguing interface between wild creatures and our responses to them with immense skill and perception, backed up by deep and extensive knowledge of the subject. More than mere reports from the rural front, thanks to both his keen eye for the natural wonders he observes and for his skilful choice of words in the finely crafted, lyrical prose, they evoke powerful emotions and really make one think about how we react to wildlife. And as a writer myself, I

admire his ability to encapsulate the essence of a bird in a few words, as when comparing the 'conversion from black meteor to terrestrial flesh-and-bone' of a Common Swift *Apus apus* entering its confined nest space to 'some magical sword that will enter a scabbard a third the width of its blade.'

My only criticism of this book is that it could have been twice as long. Buy it to savour through winter nights and then turn back to for continued delight – and a second copy for someone special, or as a replacement when yours is 'borrowed'.

Jonathan Elphick

#### THE SOMERSET WETLANDS: AN EVER CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

By Pat Hill-Cottingham, Derek Briggs, Richard Brunning, Andy King and Graham Rix.  
Somerset Books, Tiverton,  
2006. 240 pages; many colour photographs.  
CD with 19 tracks.  
ISBN 0-86183-432-1.  
Hardback, £19.99.

Having just moved home to that mysterious and beautiful part of southwest England known as the Somerset Moors and Levels, I have begun to delve into the history – and of course the natural history – of the area. Perhaps nowhere else in Britain are these two disciplines more intertwined. As this splendid volume reveals, the human history of the Somerset wetlands has had

an extraordinary bearing – sometimes good, often bad – on the area's wildlife. The good news is that, in the nick of time, the potential destruction of this unique corner of the English countryside has been halted. Thanks to enormous efforts from conservationists and naturalists, and a little help from Government, much of the wildlife is thriving again at last.

The recent trend in publishing has been towards 'niche markets', so it is very welcome to read a book with such ambitious scope: covering not only natural history, but also geology, archaeology and human history – essential to a proper understanding of Somerset and its wetlands. So in part one, 'Wetlands through Time', there are chapters on peat-digging, the legacy of which is now providing some of the best nature reserves in southern Britain; and the medieval reclamation of the moors and levels from the sea, a truly

awesome achievement by our ancestors. Part two focuses on 'Wetlands and Wildlife' – from the ecology of the Lesser Silver Water-beetle *Hydrochara caraboides*, through dragonflies (Odonata) and butterflies (Lepidoptera) (the area is excellent for both) to 'Birds in a Changing Landscape', written by the RSPB warden on the Avalon Marshes, Sally Mills. Part three looks ahead to the future of these precious wetlands. As well as covering conventional topics, such as farming and climate change, it also presents a mouth-watering vision of 'The Somerset Everglades', by Natural England's Andy King. The possibility of Dalmatian Pelicans *Pelecanus crispus* flying once again over the Somerset Levels is an enticing one. This book, and the accompanying CD of the sounds of the levels, deserves a wide audience.

Stephen Moss

#### SECRET NATURE OF THE ISLES OF SCILLY

By Andrew Cooper. Green Books, Totnes, 2006.  
224 pages; 200+ colour photographs; maps.  
ISBN 1-903998-51-4. Paperback, £9.95.

This new guidebook to Scilly contains an island-by-island guide to wildlife, together with historic sites, walks and viewpoints; it describes what to see, and where and when to see it.

#### THE POCKET GUIDE TO SCILLY BIRDS

By Nigel Hudson and Danni Borrett. Post Box Publications, St Mary's, 2006. 128 pages; many colour photographs. ISBN 0-9553430-0-3. Hardback, £7.99.

Available from [www.booksonscilly.co.uk](http://www.booksonscilly.co.uk)

An attractive and genuinely pocket-sized guide to the commoner birds of Scilly, with excellent photographs.

# Obituaries

## Christopher Alexander Roger Helm (1937–2007)

The name 'Helm' has appeared on the spine of many hundreds of books in the past 30 years, becoming a symbol of quality and excellence to ornithologists worldwide, and there can be few birders who don't have at least one or two Helm titles on their bookshelves. The eponymous publisher of all those bird books died on 20th January 2007 after a long battle against cancer, just a few days before his 70th birthday. Christopher Helm was a larger-than-life figure in many ways. At 2 m in height, he literally towered above most of his peers, while his convivial company was appreciated by a wide circle of friends and colleagues in all his areas of interest. He was a warm-hearted man with a sharp wit and the tongue that often goes with it. In later years, a long period of failing health forced him to cut back on some of his activities, though he remained active to the end and was a familiar figure at conferences and the Rutland Birdfair.

Christopher was born on 1st February 1937 in Dundee, the elder son of a Presbyterian minister, and spent the first two years of his life in Forfar. Being of Scottish descent and a son of the manse exercised a strong and lasting influence on Christopher's life. In 1939 the family moved to Tunbridge Wells, where his father continued to preach to the Scottish diaspora. During the war years, the Scottish connection was reinforced as Christopher spent many of his early school holidays in Castle Douglas, in Dumfries & Galloway, and it was here that the seeds of his lifelong love of nature germinated.

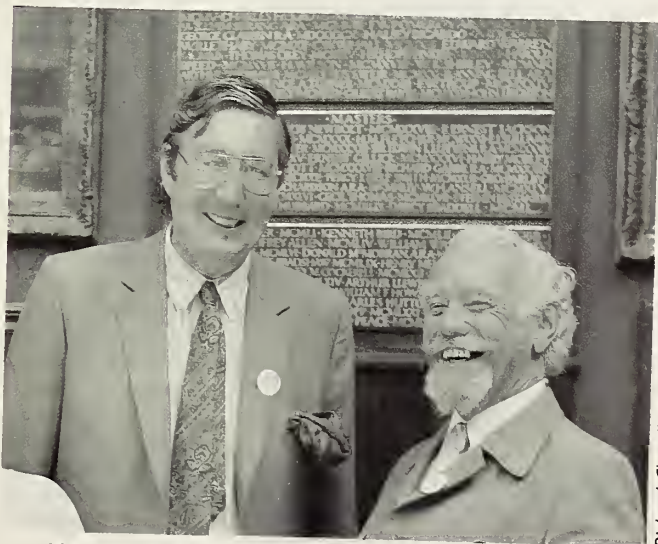
After schooling at Harrow, Christopher was obliged to undergo National Service. He joined the Highland Light Infantry and was posted to Glasgow. His potential was soon recognised and he was selected for officer training and obtained his commission. He

endured a demanding period on active service in Cyprus and in later life looked back on his time in the forces with a notable lack of nostalgia. After his time was up, Christopher went on to Gonville & Caius College in Cambridge to read Classics and Law, graduating in 1960. Many years later, in 1982, he completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Management at Harvard Business School.

After graduation, Christopher set out on the journey that would eventually lead him into publishing. His career started in advertising, firstly at Coleman, Prentice & Varley, then at Benton & Bowles. From there he moved into the promotional side of Penguin Books, and then on to Macmillan Educational. While at Macmillan, Christopher made friends with David Croom, a dynamic young editor from Allen & Unwin. There was an instant meeting of minds and they realised that, in the expanding market for tertiary-level education, they could be fleetier of foot than the established monolithic publishers. Thus, in 1972,

Croom Helm Ltd was incorporated. The concept was to commission broadly scholarly works from young academics, publish them quickly and market them on an international scale. David Croom was the editor and Christopher the marketeer. The concept worked because of the short publication schedule and the wide export-sales network that Christopher set up; Croom filled the warehouse and Helm emptied it.

Christopher always commissioned some books, however, and this soon began to include some bird books. The first Croom Helm bird book was published as early as 1974, but the turning point came with the commissioning in 1978 of Peter Harrison's *Seabirds*. This seminal work, published in 1983, broke new ground. It was the first bird book covering a specific group of birds to concentrate mainly on field identification and, most importantly, to illustrate them fully. Never before had there been such a useful book with which to identify such a challenging group of birds. It was followed, in 1986,



Richard Chandler

109. Christopher Helm (left) with Kevin Carlson, at the awards ceremony for Bird Photograph of the Year, London, July 1987 (Christopher Helm Ltd sponsored the event, and Kevin Carlson was the overall winner that year).



by *Shorebirds* and these two books became an instant success, remaining in print for the next 20 years and selling tens of thousands of copies. They were the first of the 'Helm Identification Guides', which was to develop into a long series of guides to bird families of the world. Two other key titles, *The Handbook of Bird Identification* and *Raptors of the World*, took many years to complete and were not published until 1998 and 2001 respectively, such was the complexity of putting together such authoritative works.

In 1986, Croom Helm was sold to ABP, and the two founders of the company parted amicably. Christopher went on to set up Christopher Helm Publishers, where he continued to publish largely non-academic books, specialising in ornithology, cricket and gardening. Gradually, the bird books took over and the Christopher Helm name became synonymous with the genre, notable for their quality and authority. In 1990, the need for additional funds to finance the books and protect the jobs of his staff resulted in the company being sold to A&C Black Publishers. The Christopher Helm

list became one of the key divisions of A&C Black, although Christopher played no further role in it.

Not yet ready to retire, Christopher soon began to develop new ideas for more bird books. A new company was established, publishing its first books under the Pica Press imprint in 1994. The Helm Identification Guides theme was continued, but the list included a great variety of books on birds as well as other areas of natural history. Awards and accolades continued to be won, and Helm or Pica Press books were regularly named as 'Best Bird Book of the Year' by the ornithological press. *Sealife: a guide to the marine environment* was short-listed for the Library Association's McColvin Medal for an outstanding work of reference and, in 1999, *Parrots* won the McColvin Medal. The awards ceremony that year was a memorable occasion and to this day I have no recollection of how we got home. In 2000, Pica Press was sold to A&C Black, where it was incorporated into the Helm list. In retirement, Christopher was able to enjoy his many varied interests, especially bridge, cricket and opera.

Birdwatching remained a passion throughout his adult life and his regular CBC census plot at Brightling Park gave him great pleasure. Local birding trips invariably involved visits to Rye Harbour and Dungeness and our regular January and May bird races were much looked forward to. We never broke any records, but we always had a good lunch. There were also trips abroad: a family holiday to The Gambia resulted in a field guide to the country being signed up, which has since become one of the bestselling Helm field guides ever; while the seeds for setting up

during a memorable Birdquest tour to Ethiopia.

Christopher married his first wife, Caroline, in 1967 and they had two sons, Alexander (who died in childhood from cystic fibrosis) and Zebedee. The marriage to Caroline was dissolved in 1976. His second wife, Amanda, whom he married in 1979, worked with him in Croom Helm and subsequent companies, and they had two children, Annabel and Tom. The Banks, their rambling old manor house in East Sussex, was always full of visitors from all over the world who had written, edited or sold their books, and this inevitably included an impressive roll call of the birding establishment. Christopher and Amanda were generous hosts, as many will testify.

In the 1970s, Christopher had a short fling with politics, serving as a Labour councillor in Wandsworth, and contesting the safe Tory seat of Wokingham for Labour in the 1970 general election. Although he mellowed as the years went by, he remained a 'champagne socialist' for the rest of his life. He held office at the Publishers' Association and also served on the Council of the BOU from 1991 to 1999. He deftly steered the BOU's Publications Committee through some difficult times, and finished up with a term as Vice-President. And of course, for a short time in the late 1990s and 2000, Christopher and Amanda owned *BB*, and the journal's head office remained at their home in East Sussex until 2006.

For over 30 years, the birding community has benefited from Christopher's vision and desire to publish quality and groundbreaking books for birders at all levels. He had a keen eye for the books that birders really wanted, and it is fitting that his name will live on on the covers of a good many more bird books in the future.

Nigel Redman

A shorter version of this obituary was first published in *The Independent* on 25th January 2007.



Amanda Helm

110. Christopher relaxing in France in the late 1990s.

## Roger Geoffrey Clarke (1952–2007)

Roger Clarke was a remarkable and talented ornithologist, who through diligence, unflagging enthusiasm and originality of thought became one of the world's leading experts on harriers *Circus*.

A chartered accountant by profession, Roger was born in Bedford on 8th July 1952, though might never have made an impact on the world of ornithology but for the chance sighting, when on a fishing expedition in the Fens near his home in Cambridgeshire, of a lovely grey-plumaged male Hen Harrier *C. cyaneus*. Roger's interest was immediately engaged by its grace and beauty, and his curiosity aroused, so that harrier watching soon became a passion and replaced angling as a weekend activity. At that time, in the early 1980s, the inspiration for most Hen Harrier-watchers was the artist and author Donald Watson, thus it was inevitable that as Roger began to study and question as well as observe, the two should correspond and eventually collaborate. Together with Tim Bennett they launched in winter 1983/84 the Hen Harrier National Winter Roost Survey, which in 2006/07 reached its 24th season. Donald Watson (replaced latterly by Chris Rollie) organised the Scottish counts while, after Tim Bennett's withdrawal, Roger single-handedly dealt with England and Wales, also analysing each winter's results.

For most amateurs this task would have been sufficient, but Roger sought to develop the study by identifying prey remains in pellets regurgitated by roosting Hen Harriers. The collection of pellets began in winter 1984/85 and, in due course, Roger decided to tackle the analysis himself. This was no easy undertaking, for what little guidance was then available dealt mainly with owl (Tytonidae/Strigidae) pellets and so Roger started to assemble his own reference collection, sometimes even scavenging feathers from road-kills. In letters sent to me in the late 1980s, Roger charted the growing

number of prey species identified, in one writing excitedly, 'I think we have our first Dartford [Warbler *Sylvia undata*]' next to a mounted body feather of that species. Although in the early days some mistaken identifications were made, these were soon corrected and in no way detract from Roger's considerable achievement in making himself an unrivalled expert in raptor pellet analysis.

Roger put his hard-won knowledge to further good use by examining the pellets of three other harrier species (Marsh *C. aeruginosus*, Montagu's *C. pygargus* and Pallid Harriers *C. macrourus*), as well as those of other raptors such as Red Kite *Milvus milvus* (for the then English Nature's re-establishment programme) and Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* (*Brit. Birds* 93: 136–143). Of particular value was his work for the Joint Raptor Study Langholm Project, which examined the predation of Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus* by Hen Harriers and Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus*. At the time of his death, Roger was compiling a guide to the identification of avian remains in raptor pellets and it seems doubtful whether his unique contribution to dietary studies (further developed when it occurred to him that the diet of seed-eating passerines on farmland in winter could be monitored through raptor pellets; *Brit. Birds* 96: 360–375) will be matched. Roger's PhD in Biological Sciences, received from the University of Liverpool in 1999 for his thesis on raptor feeding ecology, was richly deserved.

His expertise and a capacity for hard work led to Roger's close involvement with a number of

ornithological bodies, notably the Cambridge Bird Club (as Chairman 1995–2000), the Hawk and Owl Trust (Projects Committee Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Trust 1993–96) and the BOU (Treasurer 2000–06). This last organisation recognised his outstanding contribution to ornithology with the award of its prestigious Union Medal in 2007 (*Ibis* 149: 189–190).

India became another strand in Roger's life, following a visit to the world's largest currently known harrier roost site (consisting mainly of Montagu's but with substantial numbers of Pallids), in the grasslands of Velavadar National Park, Gujarat. The appreciation and collection of bird art was another interest close to Roger's heart. He particularly admired the marvellous skill of his good friends Donald Watson and Bruce Pearson, and also the genius of Eric Ennion (I well remember Roger's enthusiasm when showing me a series of sketches obtained from Ennion's son Hugh, each tiny but brim-full of life and movement).

Despite his considerable workload, Roger somehow found the



III. Roger Clarke.

Janis Clarke



time to research and write numerous articles and papers, mostly but not exclusively concerning harriers. Although many appeared in international journals, including *Bird Study*, *Ibis* and *Fork-tail*, he did not neglect local British bird reports, thus adding considerably to the knowledge of raptor ecology in counties such as Norfolk and Wiltshire. It was wholly characteristic that many of Roger's papers were co-authored, even when their compilation and content were largely his work, for despite a growing reputation he never underestimated the input of others and was at pains to acknowledge their help. Also characteristic was that Roger's papers usually contained thought-provoking ideas, such as the suggestion that the amount of rainfall in the western Sahel region of Africa

influences Montagu's Harrier breeding numbers in Britain (*Orn. Anzeiger* 41: 143–158).

Roger authored the Hen Harrier account for the BTO's *The Atlas of Wintering Birds in Britain and Ireland* (1986) and followed this by three well-written books: *Harriers of the British Isles* (1990), *The Marsh Harrier* (1995) and *Montagu's Harrier* (1996). He was also asked to co-author a new edition of Donald Watson's classic monograph *The Hen Harrier* (1977), though it was soon obvious that the task was considerably more than just a simple revision. Watson was by then in declining health (he died in 2005) and thus all the work fell to Roger, who was unexpectedly stricken by illness in early 2006 and diagnosed as suffering from terminal cancer a few months later. Despite knowing that

he was unlikely to live long enough to finish the book, he continued working on it to the end, writing to me on 3rd January 2007 that, 'now the monstrous Predation and the Diet chapters are complete... I'm hacking away [at] Communal Roosting... That way, if interrupted, there will be at least three solid finished chapters contributed... My condition is progressing more lately.' Roger died on 28th January 2007, aged just 54.

Roger's early death is a hard blow to the study of his beloved harriers and to his many friends, but an even harder one to his wife Janis and their two children Mostyn and Bethan. He will be missed.

Pete Combridge

## Rarities Committee news

### BBRC appoints new secretary

Following the death of Mike Rogers in October 2006, BBRC has now appointed a new secretary. The specification set for Mike's replacement was demanding; the successful applicant was required not only to be organised, knowledgeable, motivated, a communicator with good writing skills and a background in bird recording, they also had to be expert in appropriate aspects of IT, including web design and database management. We asked for all of this in return for an extremely modest honorarium. Despite this exacting specification, we received five high-quality applications. After further short-listing and a series of telephone interviews, BBRC is pleased

to announce that Nigel Hudson has been appointed as the new Secretary. We would like to extend our wholehearted congratulations to Nigel, but also to thank the four other outstanding candidates who applied.

Nigel is based in the Isles of Scilly and will be familiar to many birders who visit the islands in the autumn. His background and knowledge of bird recording and management will be a real asset to the committee, while his ability to handle all the relevant aspects of IT should make the final transition to an almost completely paperless system a reality.

Nigel will start his work with BBRC over the next few months as

duties are transferred from Pete Fraser, who has done an outstanding job of holding the fort over recent months. Observers should continue to submit records by e-mail to the following address: [secretary@bbrc.org.uk](mailto:secretary@bbrc.org.uk) Other mailing and contact details will be available from the BBRC website at the appropriate time and will also be circulated to all county recorders and bird observatories.



The British Birds Rarities Committee is sponsored by Carl Zeiss Ltd.

# News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

## 'Missing' Sociable Lapwings found – in Syria

It is one of Eurasia's most endangered species, with a population estimate as low as 400 birds – but a hitherto unknown wintering population has been discovered in Syria. A team of Dutch and Syrian birders logged 1,200 Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius* in just one day and more than 1,500 in total during their survey of grasslands in northern Syria.

'It's a finding that every ornithologist dreams of when starting out on an expedition like this,' said Remco Hofland, a Dutch ornithologist who led the Syrian Sociable Lapwing Team. 'We had spent the morning [of 25th February] looking at a number of areas that were yielding good numbers of the species [and found] almost 400 [birds in total]. We were delighted – here we were looking at one of the rarest birds on Earth, and in such good numbers! It was after these that we looked at one more area, which turned out to be the jackpot. Our team split into two and we saw 838

Sociable Lapwings, of which 700 were from a single vantage point.'

But it was not all good news. In an e-mail sent on the day of the discovery, Remco said: 'There is one big problem, however. In the eastern part of the area, a tented camp was being erected by workmen servicing a Qatari prince and the rest of his hunting party. They will probably stay around one month in luxury tents, with nothing [to do] other than to shoot more Sociable Lapwings than there are worldwide (according to the Single Species Action Plan). The Sociable Lapwings are at great risk here and there is need for immediate action.'

The birding community responded by e-mailing Syrian embassies in various European countries to alert the authorities to the threat posed by the hunting 'tourists'. Behind-the-scenes lobbying by BirdLife seems to have taken place too. Dr Stuart Butchart, Global Species Programme Coordinator at BirdLife, said: 'It's an

incredible discovery, which gives real encouragement to global conservation efforts to save this Critically Endangered species. Site protection is the crucial next step though: species that rely on a few small sites are particularly vulnerable to change – if this site isn't adequately protected, then the continued survival of Sociable Lapwings remains uncertain.'

Sharif Jbour of BirdLife Middle East added: 'In order to safeguard this newly discovered wintering population of Sociable Lapwings, we have had to act quickly, working with local government agencies and the Syrian Society for the Conservation of Wildlife to help to secure the site and its vitally important bird populations.'

The expedition by the Syrian Sociable Lapwings Team was jointly funded by the RSPB (through a grant from the UK Government's Darwin Initiative), the Ornithological Society of the Middle East and the Dutch Van Tienhoven Foundation.

## Bald Ibises return – but where are the youngsters?

Meanwhile, here is an update about another Syrian enigma: the tiny breeding population of Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita*. Three of these, the rarest birds in the Middle East, were satellite-tagged last year and tracked as they migrated to their previously unknown wintering grounds in Ethiopia. Now the birds have been tracked back towards Palmyra in Syria. One of the trio – two males and a female – had arrived home by 2nd March but the other two were lagging behind. In total, the birds have flown more than 6,000 km across seven countries on migration to and from Ethiopia.

Dr Ken Smith, a senior scientist at the RSPB, said: 'The birds' return

is fantastic news and a huge relief. Hunting, poisoning by the pesticide DDT or disturbance is stopping the colony increasing despite the birds breeding well in Syria. Knowing the migration route is a major breakthrough and means we can now tackle the huge challenge of protecting the birds throughout the year. The next riddle we must solve is where the young birds go and how we can safeguard them as well.'

The Palmyran colony was discovered in 2002 and its numbers have never risen above 13. Little was known of the birds' migration before this project began but researchers have plotted each stopover and the length and time

of each leg. On their outbound journey the birds flew south down the Arabian Peninsula and crossed the Red Sea at its narrowest point. On their return, however, the ibises flew up the west side of the Red Sea, crossing from Sudan to Saudi Arabia at the Sea's widest point (around 290 km).

'Our hearts were in our mouths because they set out to sea quite late in the morning and were still far offshore when night fell,' Jeremy Lindsell, an RSPB research biologist, said. 'These birds have been surprising us from the outset but we are determined to save them. The technology has worked superbly and the tags have lasted far longer than we expected.'



Tagging a young bird in Palmyra is the task for this summer. Paul Buckley, International Officer at the RSPB, said: 'None of the nine younger birds in

Syria last summer have been seen and that suggests that they use a different overwintering site. A year ago we were sure that the birds would stay together but these ibises

are behaving very differently. Tracking a young bird should solve this new mystery and perhaps broaden the level of the protection the colony needs.'

## And now we know where Aquatic Warblers go

Another migration mystery involving one of the Western Palearctic's rarest breeding birds has also been solved recently. A joint European-African team has finally discovered the wintering grounds of Aquatic Warblers *Acrocephalus paludicola* in Senegal.

Researchers from the RSPB and BirdLife combined scientific analysis with traditional fieldwork to narrow the search for the warbler's winter home. Working with African colleagues in February they discovered good numbers of Aquatic Warblers in an area of about 100 km<sup>2</sup> within the Djoudj National Park, in northwest Senegal. Preliminary estimates range from 5,000–10,000 birds at this single site. Before this discovery it was assumed that the population migrated to West Africa for the winter, but no-one knew where.

The Aquatic Warbler has declined dramatically in Europe over the last 100 years, reflecting the extensive drainage of wetlands, and now its global population is

down to 15,000 pairs, making it Europe's rarest breeding songbird. The research team used isotope analysis of feathers taken from birds at their European nesting sites to help in narrowing their search. Knowing that the feathers would have been grown on the African wintering grounds, the researchers looked for patterns of isotopes, in conjunction with isotope maps, which would give a clue as to the wintering grounds. This study revealed that the birds spend the winter at sites in a zone just south of the Sahara. An analysis of the few African records in combination with computer modelling of potentially suitable habitat led researchers to likely areas bordering the Senegal River.

Although delighted by their discovery, the research team has raised fears for the bird's future in Africa. The RSPB's Lars Lachmann said: 'Thankfully, substantial parts of the bird's wintering range fall within protected areas, with the Djoudj National Park alone possibly holding up to a third of the

world population. This wetland, on the southern edge of the Sahara, is likely to be threatened by the southward advance of the Sahara fuelled by climate change. This encroachment is likely to limit the water supply for the national park. Other sites thought to have formerly held this bird in winter have long since been converted into farmland and sugar-cane plantations, while other potential sites will be placed under even greater pressure by increasing drought conditions. Bizarrely, the story of the Aquatic Warbler in Africa seems to mirror the disastrous loss of the species' European nesting sites, where the bird now nests regularly at fewer than 40 locations. But knowing where they are in winter now provides a starting point to replicate the successful European conservation efforts in Africa.'

Future work in the field and with satellite maps will help to identify other potential sites in southern Mauritania and elsewhere in West Africa.

## Bulldozers threaten Polish wildlife sites

Meanwhile, the most important Aquatic Warbler breeding site is under threat in Poland after the Polish Government confirmed its intention to press ahead with a highly damaging route for its section of the Warsaw-Helsinki highway, the Via Baltica. The European Commission has warned Poland that it faces court action unless it halts the bulldozers poised to start work on the controversial Augustow Bypass through the pristine Rospuda wetlands.

Sites along the Via Baltica route are home to some of Europe's rarest birds and mammals,

including Wolf *Canis lupus*, European Lynx *Lynx lynx* and both Lesser Spotted *Aquila pomarina* and White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla*. The route would also plough through the Biebrza Marshes, the most important breeding site in Europe for Aquatic Warbler and Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*.

EU Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas said: 'I urge the Polish Government to once more consider ways of building these bypasses without causing such serious environmental damage. I believe that Poland has

everything to gain by building new infrastructure without sacrificing its most precious natural heritage.'

The road developments on Via Baltica as they are currently proposed run straight through the Augustow and Knyszyn Primeval Forests and the Biebrza Marshes National Park. All of the areas in question are protected as Special Protection Areas under the Birds Directive and are – or should be – proposed as Sites of Community Importance (SCI) under the Habitats Directive, Europe's strongest laws for the protection of natural environments.

## Large-billed Reed Warbler rediscovered

Previously known from just a single bird collected in India from the Sutlej Valley in Himachal Pradesh in 1867, Large-billed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus orinus* is a species that has had a chequered history, being variously considered to be just an aberrant individual, a hybrid, and a race of Clamorous Reed Warbler *A. stentoreus*. It was only in 2002, following a DNA investigation by Prof. Staffan Bensch of Lund University, in

Sweden, that it was finally established that it was a distinct species.

So, the revelation that another bird has been found, this time alive and kicking in a mist-net in Thailand, is nothing short of sensational. The bird was found in March 2006 by Phil Round, Assistant Professor in the Department of Biology, Mahidol University, working in conjunction with The Wetland Trust, who trapped the bird at the royally initiated

Laem Phak Bia Environmental Research and Development Project, near Bangkok, Thailand. Round recognised that the bird wasn't the more numerous Blunt-winged Warbler *A. concinens*, and it slowly dawned on him that he could be holding a Large-billed Reed Warbler. He took many photographs, a series of measurements and, most importantly, he carefully collected

two feathers for phylogenetic analysis before releasing the bird, none the worse for its ordeal.

Round contacted Staffan Bensch, who had previously examined the Indian specimen, and the latter studied photographs and DNA of the Thai bird and confirmed that the two were the same species.

BirdLife International's Dr Stuart Butchart commented: 'Almost nothing is known about this mysterious bird. The Indian specimen has short, round wings and we speculated that it is a resident or short-distance migrant, so its appearance in Thailand is very surprising. A priority now is to find out where the Large-billed Reed Warbler's main population lives, whether it is threatened, and if so, how these threats can be addressed. Now people are aware that Large-billed Reed Warblers are out there, we can expect someone to discover the breeding grounds before long. My money is on Myanmar or Bangladesh, but this species has proved so elusive, it wouldn't surprise me if it was somewhere nobody had ever considered possible.'

Further details can be found at <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.2007.0908-8857.04064x>



**112.** Large-billed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus orinus*, Laem Phak Bia, southwest Thailand, 27th March 2006.

## New Director for the BTO

Dr Andy Clements will replace Professor Jeremy Greenwood as Director of the BTO when the latter retires in September. Dr Stephen Hunter, Chair of BTO Council, said: 'I am delighted to announce that the new Director Designate of the BTO is Dr Andy Clements. Andy spent 15 years at English Nature, latterly as Director of Protected Areas, and subsequently at Natural England as Director of Science, Evidence and Policy. He is a lifelong birdwatcher and BTO supporter. In his spare time, as well as undertaking bird survey work near his home in Cambridgeshire, he leads tours for

birdwatchers in India, Africa and South America. Andy has served on the Oriental Bird Club's Conservation Committee and has published papers about Asian birds and bird behaviour.'

Speaking about his new appointment, Dr Clements said: 'I am delighted to be asked to lead the BTO. The partnership of birdwatchers and scientists fostered at the BTO is a powerful alliance, delivering knowledge of our birds and their habitats into the heart of decision-making about the environment. It is a challenging and exciting time to take on the role of Director, just as work on Bird Atlas

2007–11, a complete stocktake of the birds of Britain and Ireland, is due to start. Jeremy Greenwood will leave a remarkable legacy of a healthy and vibrant organisation, and I aim to continue the BTO's growth.'

Jeremy, who has been the BTO's Director since 1988 (as well as a Director of *British Birds* since 2000), has overseen a huge growth in the Trust's membership, managed the organisation's move from Tring (Hertfordshire) to The Nunnery in Thetford (Norfolk) and has also overseen the development of BTO Scotland, in Stirling.



## Homes v Woodlarks ruling challenged

A bold move by Natural England to curb housebuilding in the Thames Basin by citing the threat to heathland bird populations (*Brit. Birds* 99: 330–331) has been challenged by a planning inspector. New housing around the commuter-belt towns of Guildford, Woking, Bracknell, Farnborough and Aldershot has been on hold for more than a year over concerns for the Thames Basin Heaths and their wildlife.

Natural England's approach was designed to prevent a huge rise in visitors to the internationally protected heaths and the consequent increase in disturbance to their wildlife, including important numbers of the scarce Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*, European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* and Wood Lark *Lullula arborea*. It put forward a delivery plan, backed by the RSPB, designed to make

housebuilders pay for high-quality open space to take pressure off the heaths.

However, a planning inspector has suggested that developments of ten houses or fewer be excluded from the delivery plan. The RSPB fears that this will allow thousands of homes to be built without any account being taken of their impact on wildlife. The regional development plan includes provision for 40,000 new homes in the area. Under the Natural England delivery plan, all housing applications within 5 km of the heaths would be considered for their cumulative impact rather than in isolation and any development within 400 m of the heaths would be banned. But the assessor appointed to look at the plan has said that its proposals are too strict. While accepting that a strategic

approach is needed, his report suggests that developments of ten homes or fewer should be exempt.

Chris Corrigan, the RSPB's regional director in the South East, said: 'While we welcome the assessor's support for a strategic approach to housing in the area, he appears to have missed the point. Excluding schemes of ten dwellings or less would open the door to thousands of small, piecemeal developments. The cumulative effect of 40,000 homes would remain just the same and the bird populations will not suffer any less disturbance. There is now a very real risk that the heaths will be exposed to the full impact of the increase in house numbers. The future for their unique wildlife is not bright and we could see some of Britain's most special birds disappear from the South East.'

## 'Scopoli's Shearwater' breeding in France

The revelation that 'Scopoli's Shearwater', the Mediterranean subspecies of Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*, is breeding on the Biscay coast of France is one of the items on a new seawatching website.

Seawatch SW ([www.seawatch-sw.org](http://www.seawatch-sw.org)) reports that owing to 'difficulties in field identification, the Mediterranean race 'Scopoli's Shearwater' *C. d. diomedea* has yet to be recorded with confidence from the UK mainland, although a fully documented and photographed bird was claimed from the Isles of Scilly in August 2004 by Bob Flood and Ashley Fisher. The remarkable discovery of a breeding colony of Scopoli's Shearwater on the French Biscay coast may, however, change our perception of the occurrence of this race in Atlantic waters. For some years Cory's Shearwaters have been seen gathering close inshore off the French coast of southern Biscay. These summer gatherings, sometimes containing in excess of 100 individuals, include birds seen

singing, displaying and copulating.

'In 2005 a recently fledged juvenile was found nearby on land, while intensive searching in 2006 led to the discovery of three breeding pairs. Song and biometrics clearly indicated that they were Scopoli's Shearwaters, and analysis of similar data taken from eight birds examined in the hand in 1988 from the same area also indicated that they were Scopoli's Shearwaters! The nearest known breeding colony of Cory's Shearwaters is some 600 km to the south, on the Berlengas Islands off Portugal.'

Seawatch SW has been set up to co-ordinate a continuous seawatching programme off Gwennap Head in Cornwall, from mid July to mid October. In particular, the survey team will monitor sightings of the Critically Endangered Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus* and Basking Sharks *Cetorhinus maximus*; a paper on Balearic Shearwaters by Russell Wynn and Pierre Yésou will be published shortly in *BB*.

## Red Kites are on the buses

It's not often that you would compare a Red Kite *Milvus milvus* with the back end of a bus. But a new partnership between Go North East and Northern Kites has put birds on buses – and raised the profile of the reintroduction project that brings people and wildlife together. The buses plying the Red Kite route along the Derwent Valley in northeast England, from Newcastle to Consett, have an eye-catching livery. The larger-than-life pictures of Red Kites painted on the buses include a head-on view that has the kite's yellow eyes beaming out from the headlights.

Red Kites were reintroduced to the Derwent Valley from 2004 after an absence of over 170 years. More than 90 were released over three summers and the first kite chicks were hatched in 2006. Go North East's new Red Kite buses run past many of the best places to see kites and the company is planning to provide kite awareness training for bus drivers on the route so that they can provide information to passengers.

## A field guide for Iraq

Iraqi birders now have a field guide to the country in Arabic, a significant boost for wildlife conservation in Iraq, where the first tentative steps have been taken to survey the country's birdlife. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Iraq* is the first comprehensive, fully illustrated field guide to an Arabic-speaking country and covers all of the 387 species recorded in the country. The field guide was made possible through funding from the Canadian Government via the Canada-Iraq Marshlands Initiative, the World Bank, the Ornithological Society of the Middle East (OSME) and AviFauna.

'For Iraq – a nation that has lost so much of its wildlife in the last 20 years, this book opens the door for the growing conservation movement in this country,' said Dr Ali Douabul of Nature Iraq. 'Local-language field guides are crucial tools for conservation. They encourage people to realise, appreciate and get involved in bird conservation, which, because birds are good indicators of the environment, has potential benefits for all of our wildlife.'

The release of the field guide adds weight to the emerging conservation movement in Iraq. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein's government in 2003, the Mesopotamian Marshes – thought to be the site of the Biblical Garden of Eden and home to 28 of Iraq's Important Bird Areas – have been the focus of a major international programme to help to restore their ecological and social-cultural heritage. Under the Saddam regime, more than 90% of the marshes were destroyed through drainage. They originally covered nearly 9,000 km<sup>2</sup> but in 2003 they had been reduced to c. 7% of their original extent. Since then, however, some 40% of the land has been re-flooded, and wildlife – and with it food for Iraq's people – is returning.

'These are some of the most wildlife-rich sites in the Middle East, but often all we hear about is the conflict,' said Richard Porter, BirdLife International's Middle East Advisor and co-author of the guide. In recent years, Richard has led a team from BirdLife International that has trained biologists from Nature Iraq in skills to survey and monitor the wildlife in Iraq's marshes.

The Mesopotamian Marshes constitute one of the largest wetlands in the Middle East, providing a vital stopover for thousands of waterbirds on migration and during the winter. They are also recognised by BirdLife as an Endemic Bird Area (EBA) based on the fact that the area contains three endemic species: Iraq Babbler *Turdoides altostris*, Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis* and Grey Hypoclius *Hypoclius ampelinus*.

## The Birds of Mauritania

An annotated checklist of the birds of Mauritania is in preparation, and any birders who have visited the country recently are urged to send their records to the main author: Paul Isenmann, CEFE/CNRS, 1919 route de Mende, F-34293 Montpellier cedex 5, France (paul.isenmann@cefe.cnrs.fr)

## First Arctic Redpoll 'collected' by clod of earth

Reading Ian Wallace's commentary on 'demoted' British rarities in the recent BBRC report, Allen Banks was intrigued by reference to the first British record of 'Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll' *Carduelis hornemannii hornemannii* in Co. Durham (*Brit. Birds* 100: 96). He went to his copy of *History of the Birds of Durham* by George W. Temperley (1951) and discovered that the collected specimen met its end in a typically robust Georgie manner.

Temperley quoted John Hancock (*Catalogue of the Birds of Northumberland and Durham*, 1874): 'I have seen only a single example of this species; it was knocked down on the 24th of April 1855, with a clod of earth, on the sea-banks, near Whitburn, where it had been observed flying about for a few days.' As Mr Banks observed to N&C: 'The account of its demise seems unusual to say the least...'

Whitburn, a coastal site (and now in South Tyne-side), remains a rarity hotspot. But most rare passerines that alight there nowadays are treated with a little more respect.

## Malta defies EC with 2007 spring hunting

The Maltese Government has defied the European Commission by confirming that spring hunting will be allowed in 2007. This will be the fourth spring hunting season since Malta joined the EU in 2004.

A Commission spokesman said: 'The European Commission has noted the decision made by the Maltese authorities and regrets that this step has been taken. The principle of permitting spring hunting is already subject to an infringement procedure started last June against the government. Spring hunting is not permitted under EU law if there is an existing alternative to it. We maintain that there is and thus Malta is breaching EU law. This will lead Malta to the European Court of Justice.'

The Ornith Committee, set up by the Maltese Government with the task of ensuring that hunting and trapping are sustainable, recommended to the Maltese Environment Minister on 26th February that hunting of Quail *Coturnix coturnix* may be permitted between 1st April and 10th May and of Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* between 10th April and 20th May.

In January, the European Commission called an information meeting in Brussels for all those concerned in the issue: the Maltese Government, the hunters and BirdLife. Following the meeting, Commission officials made it clear that no derogation from the Birds Directive was justified and, by permitting hunting in spring, Malta was in breach of its obligations under that directive.



## The Bird Conservation Targeting Project: using your bird records to improve birds' fortunes

A pioneering project has been developed recently by a collaboration of conservation and Government bodies (Natural England, RSPB, BTO and Forestry Commission England) to help to reverse the alarming population declines of farmland and woodland birds in the UK. Records from birdwatchers are of great importance to this project as they can contribute directly to the conservation of scarce and/or declining species.

During the past few decades, specialist farmland and woodland birds have often been the species which have declined most. As a group, woodland specialists have declined to approximately 80% of their numbers in 1970, while farmland specialists have declined to less than 40% of 1970 levels. Extensive research has shown that by improving the habitats of these most vulnerable species, we can increase their numbers and begin to reverse the declines.

Each year, the Government spends many hundreds of millions of pounds on land management for wildlife. Grant schemes such as

Environmental Stewardship in England pay farmers for wildlife-friendly management of farmland and woodland habitats. Inevitably, however, resources are limited and must be used to the greatest effect. Experience has shown that species recovery is most effective when conservation work is focused on sites where the largest and most viable populations of a species occur, as experience with both Stone-curlews *Burhinus oedipnemus* and Cirl Buntings *Emberiza cirlus* shows. For example, landowners in Cirl Bunting strongholds have received Government funding to leave weedy stubbles for winter seed food, manage field margins for invertebrates essential for chick survival, and maintain thick hedges suitable for nesting; and the Cirl Bunting population increased by 146% between 1992 and 2003 on land where Government-funded management was carried out. The Stone-curlew population in England decreased dramatically after the Second World War but concerted conservation effort in the species' strongholds

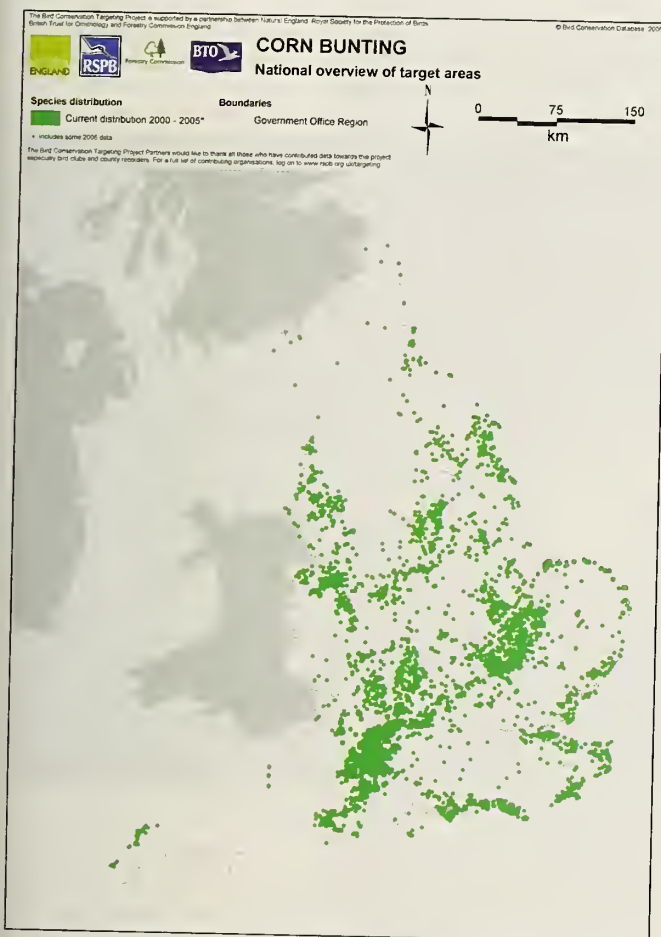
has turned the decline around. Government funding has allowed landowners to manage areas of fallow land and grassland so that they provide suitable nesting and feeding sites for Stone-curlews, and the population has doubled, to more than 300 pairs, in the past 20 years. The success of these two recovery programmes demonstrates the importance of targeted conservation effort. The Bird Conservation Targeting Project (BCTP) will produce the best maps of bird distributions so that we can help to put the right habitat management in the right places. In England, Higher Level Stewardship is the Government grant scheme for farmers in England aimed at the highest priority habitats and species and this project ensures that funding is allocated wisely. The BCTP maps will also be used to direct funds from the English Woodland Grant Scheme and to help to target appropriate management of land owned by public bodies and conservation organisations.

The project will consider more than 30 species across the UK that can be helped by habitat improvements. For example, Corn Buntings *E. calandra* are concentrated in areas dominated by arable farmland and have declined by more than 85% over the past 25 years ([www.bto.org/birdtrends](http://www.bto.org/birdtrends)), because of a reduction in both summer and winter food availability. In areas where large Corn Bunting populations are found, landowners will be paid to carry out management, such as restricting the use of pesticides on crops in the spring. This will provide an invertebrate-rich feeding habitat, essential for the survival of Corn Bunting nestlings. Similarly, an increase in weedy stubble fields will provide adults and juveniles with crucial seed food, improving overwinter survival. The causes of population declines among woodland birds are



Chris Gomersall/RSPB images

**113.** Corn Buntings *Emberiza calandra* have declined by more than 85% in the UK over the past 25 years.



**Fig. 1.** Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra* distribution in England between 2000 and 2005. Initial maps have already been produced for England. Updates of these and maps for other UK countries will be produced from 2007 onwards.

complex and we are only now beginning to understand the habitat management measures required to improve survival. Woodcocks *Scolopax rusticola* have declined by more than 75% over the past 25 years while, over the same period, Tree Pipits *Anthus*

*trivialis* and Spotted Flycatchers *Muscicapa striata* have declined by more than 80%. Recent research has shown that changes in woodland structure and a reduction in active management may be the cause of many birds' declines; and that a return to active woodland

management is likely to be beneficial for wildlife.

Black Grouse *Tetrao tetrix*, Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor* and Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* are among the other species that we hope will be helped by this project. Black Grouse require a mosaic of moorland/ woodland interface habitats and rough grazing, Lapwing chicks on lowland wet grassland benefit from a heterogeneous sward, Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers need small-diameter deadwood for foraging and Nightingales prefer well-managed coppice with good light penetration. Increasingly, we understand how to help species like these; and by improved knowledge of bird distributions, conservation resources can be better directed.

The BCTP brings together bird records from a wide range of sources – from national datasets and local bird clubs to individual bird records. These data are verified by regional experts as necessary, before being used to create the most up-to-date and comprehensive distribution maps. In turn, these maps will enable the effective use of Government money by targeting habitat management. For more information about the project, log on to [www.rspb.org.uk/targeting](http://www.rspb.org.uk/targeting).

(Contributed by Sally Fisher, on behalf of Natural England, RSPB, BTO and Forestry Commission England; e-mail [sally.fisher@rspb.org.uk](mailto:sally.fisher@rspb.org.uk))

## How to submit records

BirdTrack, a partnership between the BTO, RSPB and BirdWatch Ireland, allows you to store and manage your bird records online, while contributing directly to the conservation of birds. Register as a recorder by simply logging on to [www.birdtrack.net](http://www.birdtrack.net), which allows you to enter lists of birds seen or heard when out birdwatching, as well as additional casual records. You can enter as much detail as you like – if you know the bird's breeding status, this will help in targeting the management of important breeding habitats.

BirdTrack uses your bird records to investigate species distributions and migration movements, all of which contribute to species and site conservation. BirdTrack also makes it easy to forward your records to County Recorders, so observations have great local value as well.



# Recent reports

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Eric Dempsey

John Carter



114. Adult White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*, Hayle, Cornwall, March 2007.

This summary of unchecked reports covers early February to early March 2007.

Black Duck *Anas rubripes* Ventry (Co. Kerry), 21st February. Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis* Loch Leven (Perth & Kinross), 14th February to 7th

John Carter



115. White-morph Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus*, Stepper Point, Cornwall, March 2007.

March, with two there on 25th February and 5th March; Cotswold Water Park (Wiltshire/Gloucestershire), 17th–25th February; Benbecula (Western Isles), up to four, including two long-stayers, to 26th February, with at least one to 7th March; Clea Lakes (Co. Down), long-stayer to 25th February; Caerlaverock (Dumfries & Galloway), long-stayer to 7th March; Sonning Eye Gravel-pits (Oxfordshire), long-stayer to 26th February. Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola* Lough Atedaun (Co. Clare), long-stayer to 25th February. Barrow's Goldeneye *Bucephala islandica* Quoile Pondage (Co. Down), long-stayer to at least 25th February; Callander (Forth), long-stayer to 7th March.

Pacific Diver *Gavia pacifica* Penzance (Cornwall), 17th–27th February; Llys-y-Fran Reservoir (Pembrokeshire), long-stayer to 8th March. White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii* Unst (Shetland), 18th–25th February; Hayle (Cornwall), 25th February to 9th March; Lewis (Western Isles), up to two until 3rd March.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* Otterton/Budleigh Salterton area (Devon), long-stayer to 9th

March. Great White Egret  
*Ardea alba* Broad Lough  
(Co. Wicklow), 23rd Feb-  
ruary. Glossy Ibis *Plegadis*  
*falcinellus* Lytham St Anne's  
(Lancashire), 15th–28th  
February.

'Black-eared Kite' *Milvus*  
*migrans lineatus* Snet-  
tisham/Dersingham area  
(Norfolk), long-stayer to 6th  
March. Gyr Falcon *Falco rus-*  
*ticolus* Stepper Point (Corn-  
wall), long-stayer seen again  
22nd February to 9th  
March.



Mike Atkinson

116. First-winter Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*,  
Inland Sea, Anglesey, February 2007.

American Golden Plover  
*Pluvialis dominica* Dorrington  
Fen (Lincolnshire), 4th  
March. Long-billed Dow-  
itcher *Limnodromus*  
*scolopaceus* Mistley Walls  
(Essex), 9th March; Inland  
Sea, long-stayer to 8th  
March, same Malttraeth  
Marsh (both Anglesey), 3rd  
March; Oare Marshes  
(Kent), long-stayer to 8th  
March; Dundalk (Co.  
Louth), long-stayer to at  
least 1st March. Lesser Yel-  
lowlegs *Tringa flavipes*  
Roscarberry (Co. Cork),  
long-stayer to at least 4th  
March. Spotted Sandpiper  
*Actitis macularius* Hayle  
Estuary (Cornwall), long-  
stayer to 9th March.



Kevin Durose

117. First-winter Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*, Hayle Estuary,  
Cornwall, March 2007.

Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla*  
Exmouth, 23rd–27th Feb-  
ruary, same Seaton, 28th  
February, same Exmouth  
Marsh (all Devon), 9th  
March, presumably the same  
as seen elsewhere in Devon  
in January and early Feb-  
ruary. Franklin's Gull *Larus*  
*pipixcan* Hayle Estuary  
(Cornwall), 2nd–3rd and  
6th March. Bonaparte's Gull  
*Larus philadelphia* Cobh (Co.



Kevin Durose

118. First-winter Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan*,  
Hayle Estuary, Cornwall, March 2007.



Stef McElwee

119. Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus*, Lewis, Western Isles, February 2007.

Bill Baston

120. Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus*, Martlesham Heath, Suffolk, February 2007.

Adrian Dancy

121. Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*, Irlam Moss, Greater Manchester, March 2007.

Cork), 11th–13th February; St Mary's (Scilly), long-stayer to 23rd February; Ferryden (Angus), long-stayer to 4th March. 'American Herring Gull' *Larus argentatus smithsonianus* Rossaveal (Co. Galway), 22nd–23rd February; Nimmo's Pier (Co. Galway), long-stayer to 6th March. Glaucous-winged Gull *Larus glaucescens* Ferryside, Tywi Estuary (Carmarthenshire), 2nd–5th March (the same, ringed, individual as that in Gloucestershire in December). Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea* Portavadie (Argyll), 11th–25th February, presumed same as one in Argyll in January. Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri* Nimmo's Pier, long-stayer to 4th March

Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius* Dungeness (Kent), 6th–7th March. Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi* Northwick Warth (Gloucestershire), 9th March. Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* Irlam Moss (Greater Manchester), 8th–9th March. 'Black-throated Thrush' *Turdus ruficollis atrogularis* Bute (Argyll), long-stayer to 3rd March. Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus* Bromley (London), 13th February; Arne (Dorset), 2nd March. Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* Newquay (Cornwall), 24th February to 8th March. Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* Amwell Gravel-pits (Hertfordshire), long-stayer to 9th March.



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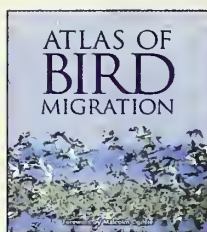
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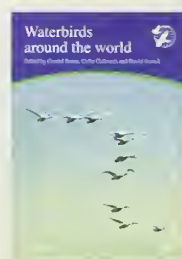


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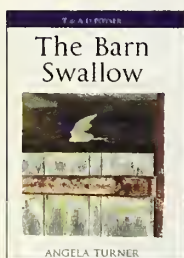


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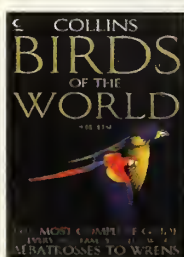


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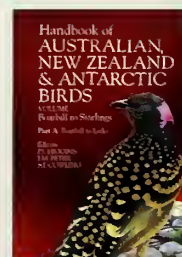


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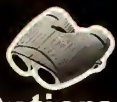
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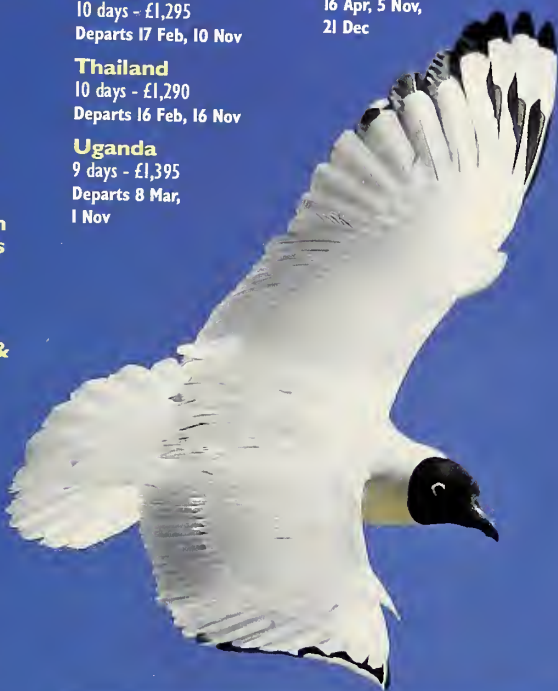
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# British Birds

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Bird illustration in the twentieth century

Common Scoters on the Solway Firth

Inland-breeding Great Cormorants





ISSN 0007-0335

# British Birds

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# British Birds

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# Bird illustration in the twentieth century, with particular reference to publications on the British scene

*Alan Harris*



An angled telescope allows the artist to see the subject and the sketchbook simultaneously when sketching in the field. Note that the telescope is reversed on the tripod head, to prevent the pan handle from interfering with comfortable drawing. *Alan Harris*

**ABSTRACT** This article traces the enormous developments in bird art for illustration during the past 100 years, with particular reference to books, magazines and other publications available to British birdwatchers. Emphasis is placed on those individuals who have broken new ground in the field of illustration. The search for the 'perfect' field guide is one of the key themes during the latter half of the century under review.

*This article is supported by The BIRDscapes Gallery  
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When *British Birds* first appeared, in 1907, it helped to meet the needs of a growing body of people interested in Britain's birdlife. Although there were full-time bird illustrators at work at the end of the nineteenth century, they were few in number as there was only a limited and specialised market for their talents. The typical scenario would be of an illustrator working under the patronage of a wealthy individual, painting under their instruction. They would be painting from a series of bird skins, perhaps collected for the patron, to create a private collection of paintings or perhaps in order to publish a folio illustrating their patron's particular interest. Bird art was thus commissioned by the wealthy enthusiast, reproduced only in classic nineteenth-century folios – with small print runs – and sold exclusively to the wealthy collector and museums. The advance from hand-coloured lithographs to chromolithography and letterpress colour reproduction was the significant first step in making the mass production of coloured artwork at low cost a possibility; this in turn would eventually make illustrated books available to a much broader range of people.

### *The early decades of the twentieth century*

At the turn of the century, illustrated bird books did not exist as we know them today; it was a specialist field, reserved for the wealthy. For them, *A History of the Birds of Europe* by H. E. Dresser, published between 1871 and 1896, was the key reference of the day. It was illustrated by (among others) Dutch artist John G. Keulemans (1842–1912). Keulemans was one of the most prolific of bird painters, contributing to over 115 books. He lived in London from 1869 under the patronage of Richard Bowdler Sharpe, working from specimens in the British Museum. Keulemans also contributed to Lord Lilford's multi-volume set *Coloured Figures of the Birds of the British Islands* (1885–98). Ill health prevented

Keulemans finishing Lilford's commission and Archibald Thorburn (1860–1935), then working independently of patronage, was contracted to complete the work. He produced 268 of the 421 plates, mostly the non-passerines. These illustrations reappeared in several books on British birds, for example as a single volume *Birds of the British Isles and Their Eggs* by T. A. Coward (1920). They were still being reprinted in this volume until the late 1960s when, incidentally, four new plates were commissioned from Robert Gillmor by publisher Frederick Warne.

A number of the plates from Lilford's work were also used to produce the first widely available and accessible bird book, *The Observer's Book of Birds*, in 1937. This tiny volume was the mainstay of many post-war ornithologists. Each plate showed a species in a natural pose and



**Fig. 1.** Firecrests *Regulus ignicapilla* by John Keulemans, from Lord Lilford's *Coloured Figures of the Birds of the British Islands* (1885–98). This example is typical of his work – the birds are accurate in pattern and structure, if lacking a little in character, and are set in well-executed habitat.



setting, usually the brighter male but occasionally the pair (the female often just nominally hinted at), without being specifically arranged to show field characters (notably the Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, with its bill deep in mud!) or a range of plumages. Feather tracts were accurately portrayed, notably in the waders, and in this respect it was way ahead of several later, 'new' field guides. It was with this small book that field observers were first armed.

James Fisher regarded Thorburn as the first great bird artist of the twentieth century. Thorburn was the first to embrace the new age of print and his work remained popular long after his death in 1935. In 1967, James Fisher renewed interest in his work by reprinting the plates from Thorburn's four-volume *British Birds*, originally published by Longmans between 1915 and 1918, in his book *Thorburn's Birds*, published by Ebury Press. They were large plates, typically featuring several closely related species and covering almost every bird recorded in the British Isles at that time (including the 'Hastings Rarities'), delightfully yet economically set in habitat. For me, it was to be an influential introduction to bird art.

A series of 135 plates by Allen W. Seaby (1867–1953) also proved highly influential to budding bird painters in the early decades of the twentieth century. They formed the bulk of the illustrations in *The British Bird Book* by F. B. Kirkman and F. C. R. Jourdain, published in 12 parts between 1910 and 1913. George E. Lodge (1860–1954) and Winifred Austen (1876–1964) (a fine painter and etcher of birds) also contributed significant plates. A condensed volume, *British Birds*, with all the plates and facing pages of text, was published in 1930 and reprinted many times. The publishers, T. C. & E. C. Jack, reused many of the plates in several other books. Kirkman produced perhaps the first small, pocket-sized book, *British Birds* (published by Nelson in the late 1920s), illustrated with what Eric Ennion described as Seaby's 'exquisite line sketches' (Robert Gillmor pers. comm.). This was enlarged and reprinted at least six times in the early 1930s.

Another book published around this time was *The Bodley Head Natural History* (1913), featuring some remarkable work by J. A. Shepherd (1867–1946), a magazine illustrator and cartoonist. Unusually for the time, each species was illustrated by a series of simple field sketches drawn directly from life; they are some

of the earliest published 'jizz'-orientated illustrations.

### *The Handbook*

*The Handbook of British Birds* was published by H. F. & G. Witherby between 1938 and 1941, a major triumph in war-time Britain. The five volumes were a much enlarged and revised version of the *Practical Handbook of British Birds*, first published (without colour illustrations) between March 1919 and February 1924. *The Handbook* at last had colour illustrations, although these were not commissioned specifically for the work. A series of 407 paintings by Marinus A. Koekkoek (1873–1944) had been prepared in Lieden (from whence Keulemans had learnt his trade) between 1922 and 1935 for a work on the birds of The Netherlands, *De Vogels van Nederland* by Dr E. D. van Oort. These formed the bulk of the coloured plates in *The Handbook*, but a number of additional plates were required to illustrate the British avifauna, and Witherby commissioned Roland Green (1890–1972), H. Grönvold (1858–1940), George Lodge, Philip Rickman (1891–1982) and Peter Scott (1909–1989). Koekkoek's illustrations have, I think, been unfairly judged by modern commentators. Both he and fellow countryman Keulemans were 'museum men' and although Keulemans captured the 'jizz' of the living bird a little better and was able to place it in habitat with confidence, the birds depicted by Koekkoek are highly accurate, some showing field characteristics 'discovered' only much later. In reviewing the work of these illustrators, it is worth remembering that fieldwork would have been difficult; optics were of poor quality and photographic references would have been virtually non-existent. Travels abroad in search of the living bird were fraught with dangers, as the young Keulemans discovered, having had to abandon plans to live in Africa through ill health.

*The Handbook* was a massive step forward in terms of both illustrations and text. Volume 3, featuring as it did raptors and wildfowl, sold especially well and became the reference for the learned country sportsman (A. Witherby pers. comm.)! *The Popular Handbook*, published in 1962, condensed the five-volume set into one, and contained within the text some of the first illustrations drawn specifically as field identification aids, some pen-and-ink drawings by Peter Hayman (1930–).

### The post-war years

David Bannerman's *The Birds of the British Isles* (published between 1953 and 1963) was another major work that deserves some discussion. It was a grand, 12-volume set more in the style of a lithographic folio (taking ten years to publish) and featured the work of George Lodge, who sadly never lived to see the set published. It was one of the last of this type of publication and, even then, was almost a step back in time. Lodge provided nearly 400 plates and the book was the culmination of a long career devoted to illustrating 'scientific books' (Vincent & Lodge 1980). His paintings were large and often executed in oil and tempera, and his birds, though lifelike, often had that 'beaten out of dense cover' look and the appearance of being in poor condition, which for me added something to the excitement and mystery of his illustrations of rarities in the *Witherby Handbook to the Rarer British Birds*!

The growing interest in birds in Britain was nurtured by, and in turn was fuelling, the RSPB, who embraced bird art effectively as a way to win and educate more members. Thorburn had produced Christmas card designs for the RSPB from 1899 until his death in 1935. The mantle then fell to Charles Tunnicliffe (1901–1979). His cover paintings for the RSPB magazine *Bird Notes* (from 1953 to 1965) were delightful watercolour designs and his series of tea cards produced by Brooke Bond helped to take the conservation message to a wider audience. The two sets of British Birds, 'Bird Portraits' in 1957 (later appearing as a book) and 'Wild Birds of Britain' (in 1965), were clever in composition and the albums featured exquisite scraperboards. Along with his series of four Ladybird books covering the seasons, entitled *What to Look for in...* (*Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter*), these popular publications were readily available and inspirational to many children and adults alike.

Tunnicliffe's work was by no means restricted to birds and he is well known to a wider audience for his illustrations of rural life and for the wood engravings for the books of Henry Williamson, such as *Tarka the Otter*. Incidentally, his true wealth of ornithological talent was fully appreciated only latterly, through publication of a selection of his field sketches, a reservoir of material used throughout his working life and so revealing of his method; he was one of the first illustrators to work extensively from material observed and gathered from life. Even more remarkable were the beautifully designed sheets of over 300 life-sized measured drawings from dead birds, known to only a few before the



**Fig. 2.** Plate 4 from *The British Bird* by Eric Ennion, published in 1943 by Oxford University Press. Printed in just two colours, owing to war-time shortages (and rather savagely trimmed), this plate shows lekking shortages (and rather savagely trimmed), this plate shows lekking displays of Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* and Black Grouse *Tetrao tetrix*. The work is lively and seemingly spontaneous; note the carefully studied tail shapes of the Blackcock, which clearly required some working out. Ennion will have redrawn these from the sketch book and did so without losing any of the immediate quality of the field sketches.



Tunncliffe retrospective exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1974. After his death in 1979, his studio contents were saved from dispersal and secured in a Heritage Centre on Anglesey. A selection of the measured drawings were published in *Tunncliffe's Birds: measured drawings* by C. F. Tunncliffe RA (Gollancz, 1984) with a text by Noel Cusa.

From the 1940s, Eric Ennion (1900–1981) was also illustrating (and writing) books with a much looser, perceptive and immediate style and, even better, was able to transfer the spontaneity of field sketches into finished works of fluid yet contained designs. Although innovative, he illustrated fewer than 30 books, and had trouble finding publishers for many of his book ideas. His studies of gull behaviour in *Signals for Survival* by Niko Tinbergen, published in 1970, were spectacularly vibrant, but my own favourite is the autobiographical tale of his efforts to establish a bird observatory cum field studies centre at Monks' House in Northumberland, *A House on the Shore* (1960), which is full of terrific monochrome vignettes and unique 'reality' diagrams of bird-trapping techniques. Few other bird artists have been as proficient as Ennion in this apparently loose (yet perfectly 'captured'), spontaneous style. In Britain, John Busby (1928–) comes close and his rapidly executed field drawings consistently capture the bird's jizz and proportions. He draws what he sees, and occasionally this leads to an uncomfortable composition but... he draws what he sees. His *Birds in Mallorca* (1988) is full of confident line. The small watercolour scenes therein are beautiful; the bold and stimulating colour combinations are perceptively chosen to surprise and impress.

Both Ennion and Tunncliffe pursued parallel careers in the fine-art side, as exhibitors of paintings, where they joined other working bird artists including Peter Scott and Keith Shackleton (1923–), creators of large oils of dramatic sea- or landscapes. Peter Scott produced many large illustrated books early in his career, which may well have been an important factor in the post-war interest in birds (N. Hammond pers. comm.). Scott is well-known as the creator of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, and his work decorated many of its publications and appeared in its popular identification guide *A Coloured Key to the Wildfowl of the World* in 1957.

### *The first true field guides*

In the late 1940s, interest in bird identification was clearly growing. Several ornithologists and publishers were exploring the way forward and the first of the modern field guides was almost upon us. Previously, illustrations in bird books had set the birds within their habitat, with little thought for their use as aids to identification. Expert fieldsmen were pushing back the boundaries, however, and illustrated bird books now required images that were orientated to field identification at the beginning of a period of discovery in some of the finer points of identification. It was thus necessary for these books to highlight field marks and characteristics – both visual and behavioural – and confusion species.

The first guide to incorporate this new approach was the *Collins Pocket Guide to British Birds* by R. S. R. Fitter, published in 1952 and illustrated by Richard Richardson (1922–1977). Richardson's plates were born of a man devoted to the field. Scientific classification was ignored and birds were grouped by size and similarity, arranged on a clear background from the smallest on the first plate through to the largest, in three broad categories: land birds, waterside birds and water birds. A second, monochrome, section contained predominantly images of birds in flight. It was a significant leap forward and all the more so for the fact that Richardson really knew his birds. It seems extraordinary to me that he rarely field sketched, but drew from memory. Because he lived on the Norfolk coast, his small passerines often look as if they are crouching behind a shingle ridge, sheltering from the northeasterly which delivered them. He was a master of the dull plumages, and his economic touch with the pen ensured that his line-drawings have never been bettered.

Just two years after the *Pocket Guide* appeared, a second field guide emerged from the same publishing house (Collins were, at that time, the centre of the natural history publishing universe): Peterson had arrived. Natural history editor James Fisher met Roger Tory Peterson (1908–1996) in 1950 and the two of them plotted the first European field guide, becoming firm friends in the process. It was Peterson who came up with the original idea for the project, fresh from his successes with the American 'Peterson' series, and this was the first field guide to embrace Europe as a whole. This introduced many keen birders to species previously unheard of and as a result many realised



**Fig. 3.** Lapland Bunting *Calcaeus lapponicus*, Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis* and Shore Lark *Eremophila alpestris* by Richard Richardson, from *Guardian Spirit of the East Bank* (Taylor 2002). This painting of three characteristic winter visitors to the Norfolk coast is a fine example of Richardson's work. He often drew in ink and then coloured the drawing with watercolour; in this example the painting has been overworked with pencil.

that these exotic creatures were within their grasp. Countries like Spain were gradually becoming accessible through the package holiday – suddenly, you could go to see a European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* and know what else to look for besides! The sales potential of the European market wasn't lost on Collins and by the mid 1970s this guide had sold 750,000 copies and been translated into 13 languages (Devlin & Naismith 1978); by 1996, sales had topped the one-million mark (Mountfort 1996).

Peterson's plates showed the birds in identical postures within each family group and 'non-ID' differences (such as jizz) were clinically eliminated. The plates were clear, crisp and the field marks highlighted with pointers (although duller plumages were often skilfully hidden behind the adult male). Author Guy Mountfort described Peterson's work as 'diagnostic portraiture' (Devlin & Naismith 1978), which I think is an excellent description. With the species arranged in Wetmore order, Peterson set the trend for field guides to follow the taxonomic order of the day, the new order superseding that of Hartert. Previous systems based on habitats, size (Fitter's arrangement of

the species by size in the *Collins Pocket Guide* did not gain universal applause) or patterns were now outdated.

Whereas Richardson was home-grown and familiar with most species, many were completely new to the American Peterson, but the unfamiliarity was easily disguised by his repetitive format. Birdwatchers tended to fall into one or other camp, Richardson or Peterson; ultimately, Peterson won through on simplicity and ease of use and was to become the benchmark. Peterson went on to 'empire build' and worry endlessly about whether or not he was a great artist, whereas Richardson was content in a spartan life, birdwatching at Cley and on Fair Isle and producing a relatively small amount of work. The 'gallery paintings' that Peterson made in later life, and which he agonised over, were, it seemed to me (of the few I've seen) to be very illustration orientated, without strong light or external influence, and owing much to Audubon in composition.

The enormous surge of interest created by these two field guides (and the inadequacies exposed therein) pushed forward the cutting edge of bird identification; suddenly, the minutiae of bird identification were uppermost



among the thoughts of top birders. The endeavours of pioneer birdmen were frequently published in *BB*, often illustrated by experts on their subjects such as Ian Wallace (1933–) and Ian Willis (1944–). Wallace daringly pushed the idea of ‘jizz’ and even exaggerated the character of the birds, while Willis went the other way, his overhead raptors represented more of a ‘flat map’ approach. The compilation of *BB* papers in *Frontiers of Bird Identification* (1980) is testament to the astonishing progress. For the keen and more expert observer, the two ‘standard’ field guides began to fall short of requirements.

Meanwhile, in the late 1950s there were several other factors at work. The formation of the BBRC in 1958 was designed to bring order to rarity claims, while the publication of *The*

*Popular Handbook of Rarer British Birds* (Hollom, 1960) fed a growing understanding of and ability to identify rarities, which had been crystallised in the mind by the Hastings Rarities affair (reported fully in *BB* in 1962). Disappointingly, the plates in this new volume were not all new, in fact most were from *The Handbook*. These older plates presented a complete contrast with the handful of newly commissioned images by David Reid-Henry (1919–1977), whose work had a light and modern touch. Producing illustrative material from around 1946, Reid-Henry worked in gouache or tempera and was able to render meticulous detail while never losing sight of the form, so that his birds ‘live’ brilliantly, occupying the space within beautifully painted habitat. Robert Gillmor (pers. comm.) described him as ‘the best painter of birds’ feet in the business’ and certainly his raptors’ feet are truly excellent – probably because, being a falconer, he was able to observe closely from life. His most substantial body of published work was for David Bannerman in *Birds of Cyprus* (1958) and the four-volume *Birds of the Atlantic Islands* (1963–68) (Watson 1980). Eventually, he became somewhat disillusioned with life in England and gave up illustrating to live his last years in Rhodesia, where he concentrated on painting (Hosking 1977).

#### *The 1960s: environmental (and commercial) awareness*

During the 1960s there was an awakening of ecological awareness and a groundswell of environmental concern motivated people. Bird conservation bodies grew rapidly in membership, and their sales departments grew rapidly too, expanding their range of products to increase funds and reach new members. Christmas cards, calendars, books and prints all took the message of conservation to receptive minds and bird art played an important role. Among



**Fig. 4.** Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* of the Canaries race *insularum*, Red Kite *Milvus milvus* and Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* by David Reid-Henry. This painting was reproduced as plate 5 in *The Birds of the Atlantic Islands. Vol 1: A History of the Birds of the Canary Islands and the Salvages* (Bannerman 1963). There is clearly a great understanding of the structure of the birds and how the feather tracts overlap and ‘fold up’, particularly on the difficult rear-view kite, while the buzzard’s wings are masterful. Placing the birds in their habitat was one of Reid-Henry’s great strengths, as this fine montane scene attests.

the most popular artists to feature on these products were Basil Ede (1931–) and Robert Gillmor (1936–). Basil Ede's paintings of birds on tinted ground with local flora owed a lot to Thorburn; his paintings were of the initially dazzling type, and extremely popular. Upon closer examination, they frequently left the critical observer uneasy, however, with slightly too many skilful visual tricks such as unzipped feather barbs and the like, and monotonous lighting. In contrast, Gillmor showed inventiveness and reliable quality, which ensured that he became a lynchpin for bird art in the surge of interest in birdlife in the UK. The wide range of his cards and calendars produced by the publishing house Penna Press were sold by the RSPB and BTO and did much to popularise birds and bird art. What a pleasure it was to receive a Gillmor card at Christmas! His strength lay in crisp clear designs (born of a strong sense of composition guided by the disciplines of print-making) and he soon became 'first stop' for the major driving forces within British bird-book publishing. After a few years teaching, Gillmor was a full-time freelance artist by 1965. His enthusiasm and genial personality soon galvanised the major bird artists of the day, Eric Ennion, Peter Scott and Keith Shackleton among them, to form the Society of Wildlife Artists (SWLA) in 1964. As a teacher and mentor, Robert Gillmor has had an immense influence on the British bird-art scene. Most bird artists in the UK since the 1960s have received his wise counsel, generous encouragement and practical advice. Gillmor acted as art editor for many publishing projects for the BTO and others, as well as serving on the councils of several bird conservation bodies.

Several publishers dipped their toes into the field-guide market during the 1960s. Oxford University Press commissioned Donald Watson (1918–2005) to prepare plates for *The Oxford Book of Birds* (1964). It was similar in concept to Thorburn's *Birds*, with several related species on one plate, but differed in that several images of each species showed various ages and plumages (though still depicted 'in habitat'), thus offering more in the way of an aid to identification. Watson did well to contain his usual freer style; his particular talent is in capturing huge, evocative landscapes on a sheet of paper while maintaining the bird interest within it at a plausible scale. It is a problem that I like to tackle myself and when (as so often) it eventually becomes

apparent that the birds are going to have to be *too* small in order to fit my composition, I admire Watson all the more! *One Pair of Eyes*, published by Arlequin Press in 1994, presents many of his bird landscapes, and is well worth a look.

As the interest in birds continued to expand, the potential market for some publications reached the financially viable point. Notable among these was the success of John Gooders's *Birds of the World* (1969–71), a weekly magazine building into nine volumes. This gave regular work to a small team of artists (including Gillmor and Hayman), encouraging some to take the plunge into full-time freelancing. This series was, incidentally, invaluable for any would-be student of bird art, as not only were new works being commissioned, but previously published illustrations from worldwide sources were reproduced, enabling those interested to become familiar with the work of illustrators who were poorly known here, such as Don Eckelberry (1921–2001), Frederick J. Lansdowne (1937–) and David Reid-Henry. I studied each issue in detail and could soon recognise every artist's work by style alone. I am guessing that many young artists were doing something similar. By researching the work of established artists, deciding what's good and finding out how it works, subconsciously 'cherry picking' favourite techniques becomes a basis for one's own style; and so much easier with the wealth of published images to pore over. I wonder if that is why so many good illustrators today are self-taught – after all, they have access to their peers as never before.

### *The 1970s: more field guides and BWP*

In the early 1970s, more field guides emerged to swell the market. *The Hamlyn Guide to Birds of Britain and Europe* was published in 1970, and was the first real attempt to compete with Peterson. Once again the plates were painted by an American artist with a Nearctic field guide under his belt, this time Arthur Singer (1917–1990). In my opinion, his style of illustration was unsuited to the field-guide format, the images apparently rendered in oils or opaque pigment. Many were inaccurate (even given the year of publication) and the artist clearly struggled with birds in flight. In particular, the structure of his wading birds and gulls was poor. Perhaps the best thing about this guide was that it was eventually overhauled by a



Swedish team, which in later editions (from 1986) introduced us to the beautiful water-colour work of Dan Zetterström (1954–), starkly superior to Singer's efforts. Singer was perhaps underrated by his European field-guide audience, as his paintings are considered to be full of life and well designed (N. Hammond pers. comm.).

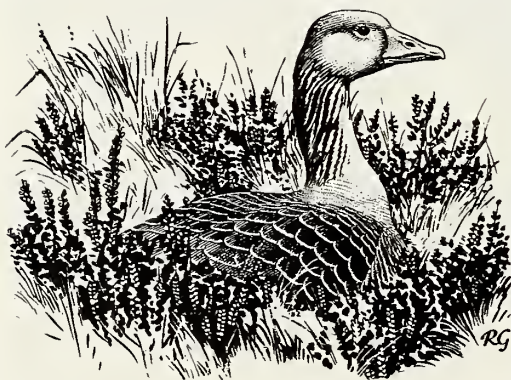
The Hamlyn guide was followed in 1972 by the *Collins Pocket Guide to Birds of Britain and Europe*, featuring the paintings of Herman Heinzel (1939–), which spread the boundaries of Europe into the now familiar Western Palearctic, and featured many island forms. It was the most completely illustrated of the guides so far, although the images were tiny and artistically unremarkable.

By the mid 1970s, the RSPB was increasingly using bird art and illustration in its magazines and catalogues, and had moved into book publishing, typically in partnership with an established publishing house. In the late 1960s, the RSPB had commissioned a set of bird identification charts from Noel Cusa (1909–1990) and these appeared in almost every bird hide or nature reserve centre at some point over the following two decades; many present-day birders grew up with them. The RSPB magazine *Birds* (developed from *Bird Notes* in 1966) featured paintings on the cover (with a few exceptions) from 1966 to 1988. For most members, the cover painting was their main exposure to contemporary bird art (Gillmor 2006). Within its

pages, a landmark series of identification 'spreads' by Peter Hayman was innovative. They featured tiny 'jizz' thumbnails which often highlighted identification through behaviour, the artist's remarkable perception captured on paper. His techniques (particularly in measured flight images) were influential as his work became widely known through *The Birdlife of Britain* (1976), *The Mitchell Beazley Bird-watcher's Pocket Guide to Birds* (1979) and later, to masterful effect, in *Shorebirds* (1986).

During this period, the popularisation of birds led to their use more and more in advertising too. Many travellers on the London tube will remember the Eagle Star advertising campaign featuring raptors by Trevor Boyer (1948–). These later found their way into book form (Philip Burton's *Birds of Prey of the World*, published by Dragon's World in 1989).

The most ambitious of publishing ventures broke onto the scene in 1977 with the first volume of *The Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa: The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. The arduous, and I imagine largely thankless, task of recruiting artists for BWP fell to Robert Gillmor. Enthusiasm far outweighed organisation (and funding!) at BWP but even Gillmor struggled to find suitable artists, perhaps because the fees and conditions were so poor. In the early volumes, many who undertook the task were able to do so only because they were not full-time illustrators, or at least did not need the fee to provide their living. Gillmor and Hayman held the fort for Vol. 1. It was perhaps as well that BWP fell so far behind its publishing schedule, as some young illustrators, eager to make their mark, later had their chance. As a set of illustrations the standard was somewhat variable. Noel Cusa's wildfowl plates were roundly condemned, which was a great shame since most hardcore birders are unaware of his skill as a painter of understated watercolours. Ian Willis's raptors were disappointing too. Nevertheless BWP highlighted the increasing requirement for illustrators to be ever more competent birders. The 'new brushes' of Norman Arlott (1947–), Hilary Burn (1946–), Alan Harris (1957–) and Chris Rose (1959–) were the next batch of artists to emerge, followed in later volumes by Ian Lewington (1964–) and Trevor Boyer. Gradually, over the years, the standard of artwork improved and the waders of the genus *Tringa* in Vol. 3 by Philip Burton (1936–) and



**Fig. 5.** Greylag Goose *Anser anser* by Robert Gillmor, from *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland* (Sharrock 1976). This is a technically clever scraperboard drawing, creating a full range of tones to set this incubating goose into the moorland. The treatment of the body feathering beautifully describes the form while a surprisingly simple range of marks become grasses and heather.

the owls by Håkan Delin (1939–) in Vol. 4 are of the highest quality.

*The 1980s: family monographs and the continuing quest for the perfect field guide*

No time was more exciting for me in British birding than when I embarked on a freelance career in 1980, with new books and magazines and a vibrant, fast-moving birding scene. An early opportunity for me on a path to serious bird illustration was provided by this journal. *BB* had encouraged line artwork within its pages for many years and began featuring line artwork on the cover in the mid 1970s. For many aspiring artists it was the first place they saw their work in print, while for others it was a step up from the county bird report. Editor Tim Sharrock was an enthusiastic champion for bird art in *BB* and instigated the annual Bird Illustrator of the Year competition (BIY) in 1979. BIY gave aspiring artists that important 'leg-up' and introduction to the publishing business, affording them exposure. Indeed Sharrock often acted as 'go-between' for artist and publisher. The list of BIY winners (Appendix 1) is a veritable who's who of the 'new' British bird artists of the 1980s and 90s and few have emerged since the competition ceased. I have known several cases where publishers have attended the prize-giving ceremony and signed up the winners!

The British or European field guide continued to fascinate publishers and the quest was still on for a worthy successor to 'Peterson'. *The RSPB Book of British Birds* (1982) is noteworthy for its return to a solely British arena. The birds of Hilary Burn are bold and confident, and her ability to deftly place the birds in their habitat in a natural, accurate and aesthetically pleasing way shows rare skill. Much anticipated was the *Shell Guide to the Birds of Britain and Ireland* (1983), illustrated by Ian Willis, although the images were too small and the colour reproduction weak. Nonetheless, it briefly held sway as the twitcher's book of choice, mainly through its fuller-than-average treatment of vagrants. *The Macmillan Field Guide to Bird Identification* (1989) illustrated by Laurel Tucker (1951–1986) and Alan Harris concentrated on 'difficult' species groups in a way that space prohibited in a standard guide, simply by ditching the non-problem species altogether; in effect, it became a dossier of mini identification papers penned by Keith Vinicombe. The second

'Macmillan', the poorly known *Birder's Guide to European and Middle Eastern Birds* (published in 1996, with text by Hadoram Shirihihi and David Christie, and illustrated by Alan Harris), set about the trickier groups of Europe and the Middle East in the same manner and really broke new ground.

The race was still on for the ultimate field guide, however. Rumours circulated of a 'super' field guide under production. In fact, the major project known as 'HBI' took well over a decade to emerge. By the time that it did, in 1998, *The Handbook of Bird Identification for Europe and the Western Palearctic* had missed its time slot. The original illustration team lost Peter Harrison, so principal illustrators Hilary Burn, Peter Hayman and Laurel Tucker were joined by Martin Elliott (1964–), who clearly knew his gulls exceptionally well, and Dan Zetterström. For the bird-art devotee, this book was a landmark because it was the largest published collection of the late Laurel Tucker's work. It is hard to describe Laurel's style, it has a looseness and is character-led, being full of jizz; every image convinces you that she's seen the bird! Her background touches are simply unique. Zetterström's raptors are magnificent and confirm his stature following the 'tasters' of the revamped Hamlyn guide and the *BWP Phylloscopus* warblers (in Vol. 6, 1992).

Meanwhile, in 1978, a series of four small bird books arranged by habitat had appeared in mainstream bookshops in the UK. Priced at a modest £1.95, they were intriguing and took a little while to catch on. The artwork was loose and variable, but the best of it was astonishing in the way it captured the character of the bird as well as accurately depicting feather tracts, wear and moult. The postures were daring, confident; no angle held fear for the artist. The flight images were remarkably lifelike and perceptive. These were live birds the like of which you saw through your bins! It surprises me now that it was 14 years before these small books (plus a fifth volume in similar format covering the Mediterranean and Alps) were amalgamated to form *Birds of Europe* (Christopher Helm, 1992) by Lars Jonsson (1952–). Many plates from the earlier series had been extensively reworked and it is fascinating in itself to compare the two styles. The new plates were breathtaking – tighter, more subtle than the earlier ones, but sublime in the depiction of character and mood (whether relaxed or alert),



the detail and jizz. For the field-guide market, it was the biggest leap forward since Peterson. Jonsson's ability to paint life into the birds is simply unequalled, the touches of habitat in *Birds of Europe* are delightfully created. The Swede has become the best known of European bird painters (with the possible exception of Peter Scott) and is deservedly held in international acclaim.

### Family monographs

In 1983, Croom Helm published the first of the modern family guides, the monumental *Seabirds*, written and illustrated by Peter Harrison. This book has special significance, not especially for its artwork but because it opened a door. Ambitious and successful, it was followed by *Shorebirds* in 1986 (illustrated by Peter Hayman and arguably showing his work at its very best) and Hilary Burn's *Wildfowl* in 1988, and opened up a new market for comprehensive global titles much in demand by the cosmopolitan travelling birder of the 1980s, as well as the increasingly clued-up birder seeking vagrants at home. The idea of books on family groups, and therefore including birds of foreign countries, was certainly not new and several were produced in the post-war period, featuring work by the likes of J. C. Harrison (1898–1985) and David Reid-Henry. These earlier tomes were, by and large, poorly known in the UK, not least because overseas travel was difficult and expensive by today's standards, and such 'foreign' guides had a limited UK market.

In the wake of the 'big three' (*Seabirds*, *Shorebirds* and *Wildfowl*), however, birders began collecting these new guides enthusiastically and there was something of an undignified rush to sign up titles by several publishers. Bubbling under the surface throughout the 1980s, this was a 'sudden' new source of work (albeit poorly paid) for illustrators. This brought several new and truly talented artists to the fore, notably David Quinn (1959–), John Cox (1967–) and Ian Lewington, as well as some more or less talented amateurs and a few rather pedestrian 'shape colourers'. The quality of the artwork was reflected in the popularity of the titles and, to some extent, the plates sold the books. However, the huge amount of illustration work involved in each volume resulted in poor estimates on timescales, a reflection particularly of the increasing need for research, which hamstrung illustrators, who took on as

much as they were able and then more. As the burgeoning list of books in production followed the rush to sign up new titles, publishing timetables began to slip at the very time that publishers needed to deliver on schedule. Deadlines slipped, some publishers were taken over and new ones emerged. Some titles were published and some were not. One publisher seems to have got it right. The monumental *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, published by Lynx Editions, has reached Vol. 11 at the time of writing, the first having appeared in 1992. Strictly business-like, Lynx has given artists realistic remuneration and the publishing schedule has been rigidly adhered to. Lynx appears to have learnt from all the mistakes of BWP, and HBW has artwork by the very best bird illustrators working today, and is notable for maintaining an exceptional standard.

### Magazines

As well as the 'in house' magazines of the conservation bodies, several new independent bird magazines arrived in the late 1980s and early 1990s to feed the growing interest in birds at varying levels, and all are home to artwork. *Birdwatching* magazine was first published in 1986 and is aimed at the reader of modest skills and interest level, whilst *Birdwatch*, first appearing in 1992, is a little more 'serious'. Both have given opportunities to illustrators to illustrate articles (usually identification orientated), but it is the more specialised *Birding World* (first published in 1987) that has taken the mantle of colour cover art vacated by the RSPB *Birds* magazine and so is presently the most illustrator-friendly. Fairly new onto the scene is *Birds Illustrated* (first published in 1991, relaunched in 2003), a British publication devoted to birds in art, from sculpture through painting to photography.

### The 1990s: the dream team and the ultimate field guide

In 1986, Peter Grant and Lars Svensson embarked on yet another European field guide. Given their (considerable) pedigree as identification experts, the project certainly had credentials. A young artist from Ireland, Killian Mullarney (1958–) was their chosen illustrator. Mullarney was an advocate of field sketching and painstakingly gathered his material firsthand. The workload associated with this approach was clearly a problem, but the recruit-

ment of Dan Zetterström to the project was a master stroke. Even so, the book was still 13 years in the making and, cruelly, Peter Grant never lived to see the result. *The Collins Bird Guide* finally appeared in 1999. The style of the illustrators' work was complimentary, and the approach of Peterson-type uniformity (to aid comparison) fine-tuned to capture the jizz collected first-hand from the field, worked brilliantly. Together with the 'in habitat' vignettes seemingly direct from the sketchbook, the quality of the artwork surpassed that of any previous field guide by some margin. Each plate is quite superb, as an aid to identification as well as being exquisite as art.

### The future of bird illustration

A&C Black acquired Christopher Helm Publishers in 1990 and, a little over a decade later, the company took over Pica Press and Poyser, both of which had a strong track record in pub-

lishing ornithological titles. This had the effect of bringing many titles in production/preparation under a single roof. This may have been good news for the bird-book-buying public, who may no longer have the dilemma of which, or how many, of the books on, say, wheatears to buy; but it was not such good news for choice, nor for the writers and illustrators involved in these 'duplicate' titles, held in limbo without publication. In some cases, illustrators were left, quite suddenly, without work.

It may be surprising to learn that even some of those artists and illustrators who are household names to *BB* readers regularly live on four-figure annual incomes, and are only able to continue painting thanks to supportive partners. Even as illustrators try to diversify, or break into the fine-art market, the decline of the family-monograph market that spurred many to take the plunge has already left some as, at best, part-time illustrators. While the



Fig. 6. The four landmark field guides, showing a progression of layout in order of publication. Top left: a well-used copy of *Collins Pocket Guide to British Birds*, by Richard Fitter and illustrated by Richard Richardson, where similar-looking but not necessarily related birds are grouped. Bottom left: *A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* by Roger Tory Peterson, Guy Mountfort and Phil Hollom. The birds are now grouped in family order with brief caption text opposite. Top right: *Birds of Europe with North Africa and the Middle East*, by Lars Jonsson. All the relevant text now faces the plate, but not all images of a particular species are always on the same pages. Bottom right: *The Collins Bird Guide* by Killian Mullarney, Lars Svensson, Dan Zetterström and Peter Grant. Now every image of the species and all text are arranged on a single spread.



future is difficult to predict, some will undoubtedly be forced into a change of career. Those bird-book illustrators still painting are as likely to be preparing illustrations for information boards or interpretation panels for reserves, country parks and other wildlife watchpoints, or painting murals in reserve centres, designing stamps or all imaginable manner of work. You will meet them at birdfairs selling their own original art. The boom years are certainly over for now, and we wait for 'a new wave'.

As some of our most respected bird illustrators enjoy retirement, the modern-day bird illustrator inhabits a very different world from that of John Keulemans a century ago. Imagine him sitting at his desk, with an endless supply of bird skins passing under his scrutiny. He knew as much about birds as anyone. Some of the species he painted may have been new to science; certainly some would not have been studied in the field, seen only by the collector who shot them. Yet Keulemans skilfully interpreted the skins to produce remarkably lifelike portraits of thousands of birds during his career.

For the modern bird illustrator things have changed. The fundamental task is no longer about portraying the bird in as lifelike a manner as possible while showing all the field marks. It is not just a matter of studying skins (in fact, that is more difficult now since the British Museum has singled out illustrators alone to pay for the privilege of examining the national collection, and that can add considerable, even prohibitive, costs to a publication). The bird-watching public is becoming ever more expectant and discerning. Not only must the illustration be structurally accurate, the jizz must be right. Ideally, the illustrator needs to see and study the birds in the field; but even though the cost of air travel is now low, such trips are expensive and it is often frustrating to feel like the only person not to know the bird – while your paintings are being used to identify it!

It is not only the economics of travel that may trouble the modern illustrator: the surge of information is astounding. In the early 1970s, I began collecting photographic images of birds for reference. Seaside postcards and monochrome images from magazines were duly pasted into a loose-leaf folder. For Europe, I now run to 12 bulging volumes (my 'alternative BWP'). For ten years or more I had only one image of a White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris*

*fuscicollis*. An explosion of rare-bird photography, identification articles and the emergence of monthly bird magazines, available at newsagents or by subscription, resulted in my White-rumped Sandpiper database extending to 27 images plus reference listings of images in various journals or books. Despite seeing White-rumped Sandpipers on only three occasions, I have enough material to gauge the typical posture, all ID features and in all distinct plumages to the extent that I no longer collect more information on this species. There are also vast numbers of images on the internet or in the digiscoped collections of many birders, to say nothing of video. This is great news surely? Well, yes, but as I start an illustration my problem now is 'have I sourced all the current information or have I missed a recent revelation?' To meet the expectation to produce first-class, bang-up-to-date work, illustrators must continually raise their game, which involves travel and research, buying countless journals and perusing websites. So, let us imagine having to paint gulls. A thorough knowledge of plumage sequences is essential, added to which you must ride a huge wave-crest of fast-moving information, be sufficiently well-informed to judge whose taxonomic opinion you favour, and maintain that position, to produce work to satisfy your peers. It's not easy! Such is the wealth of material available now that even the most mediocre of illustrators can (and should) do a stunning job with the bird itself providing they have the ability to source what's out there. As an aside, the test for many as true artists is in the treatment and understanding of form, and clues are often in the use and effect of the light source (if any!), and in backgrounds. Choose an illustrator, then look at his or her perches and leaves...

Our top bird illustrators have risen to the challenges and it is amazing how they continue to raise the bar, utilising the wealth of new information and technologies available to them with rare skill. Will forward-thinking and inventive publishers find projects to showcase their talents? The prevailing feeling today is that the search for the ultimate field guide is now over, there being general agreement that nobody will ever top the *Collins Guide*, with its superlative illustrations by Killian Mullarney and Dan Zetterström. Of course, we thought that after Peterson, and then again after Jonsson!

### Acknowledgments

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## Appendix 1. Winners of the British Birds Bird Illustrator of the Year award.

1979	Crispin Fisher	1991	John Davis
1980	Norman Arlott	1992	John Gale
1981	Norman Arlott	1993	Richard Allen
1982	Alan Harris	1994	Ren Hathway
1983	Martin Woodcock	1995	Andrew Stock
1984	Bruce Pearson	1996	Dan Powell
1985	Ian Lewington	1997	John Walters
1986	Chris Rose	1998	Paul Henery
1987	David Quinn	1999	Brin Edwards
1988	Martin Hallam	2000	Dan Cole
1989	John Cox	2001	Rosemary Watts/Powell
1990	Gordon Trunkfield	2002	Steve McQueen



# Status and distribution of Common Scoters on the Solway Firth

Clive Hartley

**ABSTRACT** Boat-based surveys associated with an environmental impact assessment of part of the Solway Firth provided a unique opportunity to carry out a detailed study of the Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra* flock which frequents this area. Estimates of the size of this flock and its seasonal variation are provided, which suggest that the Solway Firth's most important roles for this species are as a migration staging point for up to 8,000 birds from early April to mid June, and also as a moult site for almost 6,000 scoters prior to their dispersal between mid September and mid November. Diurnal movements in relation to the tide cycle and food availability are discussed. Understanding seasonal and diurnal movements is important for monitoring, and also for devising appropriate conservation measures, particularly with regard to commercial shellfishing activities and the location of offshore windfarms.

The Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra* is awarded 'Priority Species' status in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, based upon its small breeding population and the internationally important numbers that occur in the UK outside the breeding season. An extensive programme of aerial surveys in recent winters has started to throw some light on the distribution of this species in shallow inshore waters around the UK, particularly in Liverpool and Cardigan Bays in the Irish Sea (Oliver *et al.* 2001; Cranswick *et al.* 2004, 2005). Estimating numbers has proved difficult, whether counting from air, sea or land (Banks *et al.* 2005). There is also a lack of detailed understanding about local distribution, variability of numbers and the underlying factors which govern seasonal patterns in particular localities. This paper brings together the findings of several years' study of the Common Scoter population in the Solway Firth.

## Study area and methods

The funnel-shaped estuary of the Solway Firth is the largest estuary in the eastern basin of the

Irish Sea. It straddles the border between England and Scotland and occupies an area of over 2,400 km<sup>2</sup>, enclosed by a line drawn across its mouth from St Bees Head, Cumbria, to the Mull of Galloway, Dumfries & Galloway. A large proportion of this area is composed of shallow, sub-tidal and intertidal sandbanks, broken by a number of slightly deeper channels, the exact positions of which are constantly changing. Together with the Common Scoter flock which is the subject of this paper, this area supports the largest wintering flock of Greater Scaup *Aythya marila* in Britain (Collier *et al.* 2005).

Fig. 1 shows the position of the study area, while the approximate positions of sandbanks and principal channels during 2001–04, as established from boat surveys, are shown in figs. 3 & 4 (p. 284). Water depths above these sandbanks are generally less than 10 m on high-water spring tides, and extensive areas are exposed at low water. Water depths of up to 25 m occur in the southwestern half of the study area and in some of the deeper channels.

This study brings together data from the following sources: a literature review of the status



Fig. 1. The Solway Firth, showing boat-based study area and key sites mentioned in the text.

and distribution of Common Scoters in the Solway Firth since the late nineteenth century; a series of land-based observations by the author and others from 1997 onwards, from Balcarry Point and Castle Hill Point on the Scottish side of the Solway; boat-based observations by the author, carried out approximately twice per month between 10th May 2001 and 12th December 2002 and covering some 380 km<sup>2</sup> in the mouth of the estuary, with supplementary visits during 2003 and 2004 (all part of an environmental assessment of the Robin Rigg offshore windfarm site; Percival 2002); and three aerial surveys carried out in parallel with the boat-based surveys.

The boat-based surveys provided the main source of information on diurnal movements of Common Scoters. These surveys involved steaming along a series of ten parallel transect lines (A to J), located approximately 2 km apart and orientated roughly NE–SW in line with the shore and the general direction of tidal currents, sandbanks and associated channels (see figs. 3 & 4). Weather and tidal conditions limited the extent to which the individual transect lines could be surveyed during any one trip to sea. From a total of 39 trips, involving some 275 hours at sea and 4,000 km surveyed, 23 provided sufficient coverage of potential Common Scoter areas to allow a reliable popu-

lation estimate. Surveys were carried out in all months of the year and during all states of the tide. This involved counting birds on the water and in flight by distance bands, using standard methodologies based on Komdeur *et al.* (1992) but tailored to suit the local conditions and to provide a more precise spatial resolution of the data collected, particularly of birds taking flight from locations beyond 300 m of the boat. 'Distance sampling' methods were not used for the purposes of estimating scoter numbers, as it was considered inappropriate in a situation where, instead of experiencing a fall-off in sightings at greater distance on account of birds being missed, the highest numbers occurred at distances in excess of 300 m, and often as far out as 1 km or more, as birds were flushed from the water.

Owing to their nervous disposition, it was necessary to devise an approach strategy that not only minimised disturbance to the birds but also flushed them in such a way that they would take off from the water in a fairly predictable manner, allowing them to be counted reasonably accurately (without undue double counting). This approach, which is more applicable to estuarine situations than to the open sea, was helped by the birds' tendency to flock into tight packs and to frequent only a relatively small part of the estuary. The strategy was



refined as the survey work progressed, especially as it became possible to predict the birds' location in relation to state of the tide.

### Seasonal distribution

Between 13th June 2001 and 9th August 2004, 27 separate estimates of Common Scoter numbers in the study area were obtained (fig. 2). These have been combined to provide an indication of seasonal changes during the three-year period, and these patterns can be interpreted with reference to three distinct stages in the birds' annual cycle.

### Winter

Our research located a maximum of 900 Common Scoters in the study area between early December and late April, with a mean of 535 from ten separate counts. Similar numbers were encountered in aerial surveys of the Inner Solway, where there was an average of 586 from three counts between 5th November 2001 and 13th March 2002 (Peter Cranswick pers. comm.). This compares with the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the Common Scoter was reported as being a 'common winter visitor' to the Scottish side of the Solway, with flocks off Southernness sometimes so large that 'they stretch well out to the other side of the Firth' (Baxter & Rintoul 1953). The virtual desertion of the Solway as a wintering area was first noted in 1970 (Thom 1986) and was confirmed by detailed, mostly land-based, counts of waterfowl in the Inner Solway between October 1991 and July 1993 (Quinn *et*

*al.* 1993). Much larger concentrations are found further south in winter, in shallow inshore waters in Liverpool, Cardigan and Carmarthen Bays. In Liverpool Bay, more than 12,000 birds were counted by aerial surveys in three out of four winter months during 2002/03, and more than 24,000 were counted in February 2003. Numbers over Shell Flat alone – a sandbank stretching some 20 km west from Blackpool, Lancashire – were approximately 14,000 in February 2003 (Cranswick *et al.* 2005). It is possible that these locations may have benefited from the virtual abandonment of the Solway as a wintering area, although comprehensive counts for Liverpool Bay are available only for recent years and there are thus no historical data to confirm this.

### Spring passage

The first published record of substantial numbers of Common Scoters in the Inner Solway in spring was 'a huge congregation', estimated at 10,000–20,000, off Southernness in June 1891 (Baxter & Rintoul 1953); even allowing for the poor quality (or absence) of optics so long ago, this was clearly an impressive gathering. In more recent times, a flock of 1,000 (>90% male) was reported feeding at low tide on the edge of Blackshaw Bank in May 1992 (Quinn *et al.* 1993). Similar numbers were again seen off Blackshaw Bank on 12th May 1993, followed a week later by 800 at nearby Carsethorn (Collin & Bruce 1994). Some 1,200 were counted at high tide off Castle Hill Point on 29th April 1998 (pers. obs.), while

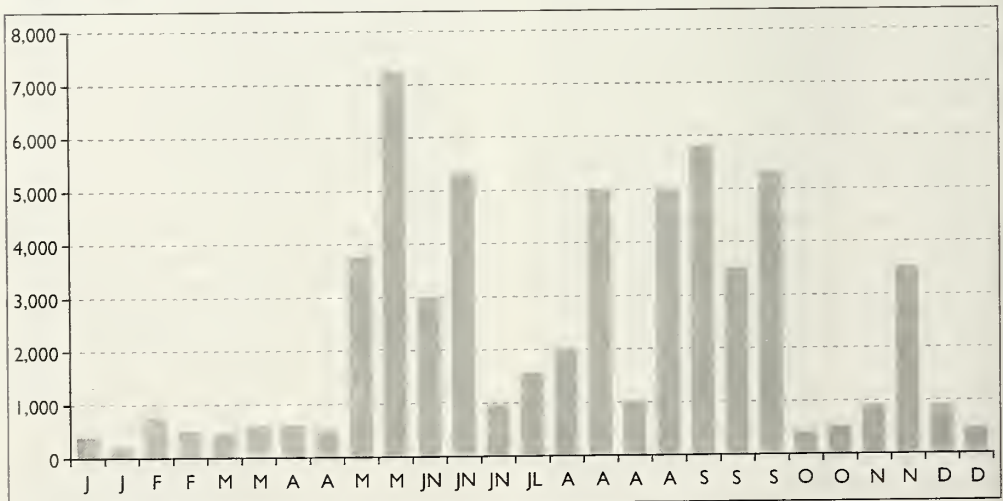


Fig. 2. Seasonal distribution of Common Scoters *Melanitta nigra* in the Solway Firth, 2001–04, compiled from 27 separate counts across all months during this period.



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**122.** The Solway study area, with the Robin Rigg meteorological mast in the foreground, looking towards the Scottish shore of the Solway in the distance.

I. Anderson recorded 5,400 off Balcary Point and Hestan Island on 22nd May 1999 (Norman 2002). Further large counts followed, with boat-based surveys resulting in estimates of 2,000–4,000 between Hestan Island and the eastern edge of Barnhourie Sands (see fig. 3) on 10th May 2001; 5,300 in the same vicinity on 13th June 2001; 3,500–4,000 off Sandyhills on 7th May 2002; 3,000 on 7th June 2002, almost equally split between males and females; 6,500–8,000 over Barnhourie Sands on 28th May 2003; and over 2,000 close behind the surf line on the edge of Mersehead Sands at low water on 27th May 2004. The timing of this spring passage through the Solway Firth, from early May to mid June, appears to correspond with the break-up of the wintering flock in Liverpool Bay (White 2003), and with the occurrence of peak numbers on the Cumbrian coast at South Walney, some 150 km or more south of the Solway (Dean 1990). This is probably related to the return to breeding grounds in Iceland, Fennoscandia and Arctic Russia, the occupation of which normally takes place between mid May and early June (Cramp 1980).

### *Moult migration*

There are some historical records of large numbers of Common Scoters on the Solway Firth between early July and mid September. Baxter & Rintoul (1953) stated that the species had been recorded on the Solway 'in some

numbers' during July and August and Atkinson-Willes (1963) also reported that flocks of several thousand had been seen on the Inner Solway in July, including 2,000 in July 1962. These records correspond with the annual influx of moulting males into UK waters between late June and early August, the majority of which become flightless for a period of three to four weeks sometime between mid July and mid September. It also coincides with an increased frequency of inland records, predominantly males but some non-breeding females/immatures as well, throughout northern England as they move into the country from northern Europe to moult (Spencer 1969; Mather 1986; Kerr 2001; Shackleton 2005).

There is evidence of a decline in the size of the Solway moult flock during the 1970s and 1980s; Thom (1986) reported that the area 'has held few [moulting birds] in recent years', while Quinn *et al.* (1993) also failed to find any significant numbers at this time of year. A recovery was first noted in 1997, with land-based counts that year of at least 700 off Caerlaverock on 23rd June, c. 1,000 off Balcary Point on 19th July, and 5,000 off Hestan Island on 25th August (Collin & Cooper 1999). Further notable counts off Balcary Point and Hestan Island at this time of year were achieved during boat-based surveys, including peak counts in 2001 of 5,000 on 28th August, and 5,800 on 4th September; in 2002 of 2,000 on 2nd August and 5,300 on 17th September; and in 2004 of 5,000





**Figs. 3 & 4.** Distribution of Common Scoters *Melanitta nigra* in the Solway Firth, 2001–04, during low-water (fig. 3) and high-water (fig. 4) periods, as recorded during boat-based transects.

on 9th August (no boat counts were carried out during July and August 2003). These counts indicate a rapid break-up of the Solway moult flock in late September, with numbers falling below 1,000 in October and November in most years, with the exception of a flock of 3,000–3,500 on 19th November 2001. This post-moult dispersal corresponds with an increase in numbers at wintering sites farther south (White 2003), and also with occasional sightings of up to 1,500 along the Dumfries & Galloway coast in Fleet Bay and Wigtown Bay (Norman 2002). The latter area is one that the birds sometimes appear to resort to when the area off Balcary Point and Hestan Island is subject to high levels of boat-based disturbance.

#### *Spatial distribution within the Solway Firth*

The results of boat-based surveys showed that the Common Scoter flock had a close affinity to a relatively small part of the study area and that, although there was movement within this area, closely related to the state of the tide, birds

**Table 1.** Mean density (birds per km) of Common Scoters *Melanitta nigra* recorded by transect and state of tide, Solway Firth, May 2001 to September 2004.

Transect	High tide	Ebb tide	Low tide	Flood tide	All tides
A	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.1
B	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
C	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
D	0.2	0.2	0.9	0.1	0.3
E	0.4	0.7	0.6	0.1	0.5
F	0.2	16.1	0.0	0.1	5.9
G	25.7	0.3	0.1	0.1	11.4
H	10.3	3.1	1.1	90.1	23.7
I	33.4	97.3	27.7	25.7	45.9
J	33.8	146.8	90.1	117.2	87.5
Mean density, all transects (A-J)	13.7	23.5	18.7	18.4	18.4
Sample size (birds)	18,650	27,810	16,087	15,728	78,275

**Table 2.** Water depths in which Common Scoters *Melanitta nigra* were present, Solway Firth, October 2001 to September 2004.

State of tide	No. observations	No. birds involved	Mean water depth (m)	Median water depth (m)
Ebb	44	983	14.8	16.5
Low	49	4,857	12.7	12.6
Flood	40	7,362	8.8	6.6
High	130	3,097	10.2	9.3
All tides	263	16,299	11.2	10.4

were seldom found outside it. Table 1 shows that densities in the English part of the Solway (transects A-E) were negligible, less than 0.9 birds per km over different states of the tide, and that most birds were found in Scottish waters (especially transects H, I and J; within 3-4 km of the shore and particularly at low water on the ebb tide).

This distribution is illustrated in figs. 3 & 4, which show the mean number of birds present per visit during low (fig. 3) and high water (fig. 4). The figures show that, at low tide, the Common Scoter flock is almost invariably located within a narrow band 2-8 km offshore from Balcary Point and Hestan Island. This is particularly so in the case of spring tides, when a large area of the Mersehead and Barnhourie Sands are exposed at low water, less so on low-water neap tides, when shallow water enables the scoters to continue feeding on the southern fringes of these sandbanks. There is a distinct northeast shift of the flock as the tide floods, with the majority moving over the Mersehead and Barnhourie Sands for the duration of the high-water period and then back again as the tide ebbs.

### Water depth

Table 2 shows water-depth measurements taken below the boat when Common Scoters were found on the water within 300 m of the boat. These are maximum figures, as there were occasions, particularly when the boat was in a channel among sandbanks, when birds were clearly in shallower water than we were able to sail into. This shows that the scoters move into water depths of less than 10 m with the flood tide and then back into slightly deeper water on the ebb. On one occasion, during the flood tide on 28th May 2003, we managed to approach a large feeding flock sufficiently closely to make an accurate measurement of the water depth in which birds were actually feeding; 8,000 birds were found in water depths of 4.7 m and less, directly over Barnhourie Sands (cells G10, H8 and H9), with many observed feeding just behind the surf line. Aerial surveys of the large Common Scoter flock in Carmarthen Bay regularly encountered birds feeding immediately behind the surf lines, where waves disturb the benthic fauna, making it more available to the feeding scoters (Lovegrove *et al.* 1994).

Local fishermen on the Solway and in More-



cambe Bay exploited the feeding habits of Common Scoters and historical records indicate that shore or tide nets were once used to catch them (Young 1999). The practice is known to have continued at Flookburgh on the Morecambe Bay coast up to the 1950s. The nets, known locally as 'douker-nets', were mostly about 1.2 m wide with a mesh of about 100 mm. These were set out on the sands at low water and held down by four small stakes, one in each corner, so that the net hung loosely between the stakes, about 40 cm above the surface. Sites where the birds had been feeding on the previous tide, determined by the birds' droppings and the holes bored in search of cockles and other small molluscs, were chosen to locate the nets. Once the tide rose, the scoters would come with it and, whether they dived headfirst into the nets or got caught in them from below, they rapidly drowned. A half-cart load (perhaps as many as 300 birds) was not considered a particularly extraordinary catch!

### Food resources

Common Scoter diet has been studied mainly through the examination of the gut contents of shot birds. They feed primarily on bivalve molluscs, including *Macoma balthica*, *Cerastoderma edule*, *Mytilus edulis*, *Mya arenaria*, *Spisula subtruncata*, *Arctica islandica*, *Donax vittatus*, *Tellina tenuis* and *Venus corallina* (Percival 2002). They will also feed on gastropod mol-

luscs, crustaceans (isopods, amphipods and small crabs), annelids and echinoderms, all of which are generally typical of sandy substrates, but bivalves tend to predominate in their diet. They are not thought to be particularly selective in which bivalves they take, with the species composition usually reflecting the more common species in the benthos. These bivalves are normally obtained by dives of 1.0–3.7 m, although dives of up to 30 m have been recorded (Cramp 1980).

The intertidal flats of Mersehead and Barnhourie Sands, where the scoters feed, are characterised by fine, muddy sands, of which the cockle *Cerastoderma edule* and the Baltic Telling *Macoma balthica* are characteristic species, particularly on the mid to lower shore (Covey & Emblow 1992; Cutts & Hemingway 1996), with the bivalve *Nucla sulcata* predominating further out where most Common Scoters are to be found during the ebb and low-water periods (Percival 2002). As cockles make use of tidal currents to aid dispersal, their availability to feeding scoters is normally greatest on a flooding spring tide (Coffen-Smout 1995).

The harvesting of cockles, using hand-gathering techniques, has taken place at low tide over the Mersehead and Barnhourie Sands for many years, although at the time of writing the fishery is temporarily closed to all forms of commercial exploitation as there are insufficient stocks of cockles. In the Solway Firth it takes two to three years for cockles to grow to a commercial size of 22 mm (Howell *et al.* 1994). Undersize cockles are discarded by hand-gatherers and are usually left on the dry sand, where they must wait for the tide to come in before they can bury themselves. This may increase the pickings for feeding scoters as they move in on the flood tide, although they may prefer to take larger prey if the handling time of small items outweighs the energy gain.

Commercial cockle dredging took place on the Scottish side of the Solway Firth for a short time from 1987 to 1994, with between four and six tractor-dredgers operating in the vicinity of Mersehead Sands over the low-tide period and between six and eight suction-dredge boats also working the area on a less regular basis at high tide (Quinn *et al.* 1997). This activity, which was totally unregulated, was associated with an increase in the cockle harvest within the Inner Solway from 33 tonnes in early 1987 to 4,519 tonnes in 1991, and a decline of 80% in the



123. The author, surveying Common Scoters *Melanitta nigra* from the *Solway Protector* in July 2004.

biomass of cockles present during the early 1990s (Lancaster *et al.* 2000). The unsustainable nature of this operation led to the banning of boat dredging in 1992 and tractor dredging in 1994. It is possibly no coincidence that a recovery of the numbers of Common Scoters in this area appears to have taken place from 1993 onwards and particularly since 1997, which may be related to a recovery in the cockle stock and also to the cessation of disturbance by boat dredges during the crucial flood-/high-tide scoter feeding period.

#### *Relationship to distribution of Greater Scaup within the Solway Firth*

The principal feeding area of the Common Scoters identified in this study (Mersehead and Barnhourie Sands) was also the main area used by up to 2,500 Greater Scaup as a high-tide feeding and roost area from November 1991 to March 1994, when commercial cockling in the Solway was at its peak. Records of Common Scoters during this period were limited to sightings further into the Inner Solway, off Powfoot and Blackshaw Bank, which suggests that they had either vacated Mersehead and Barnhourie Sands owing to competition from the Scaup or had not previously occupied this area. The banning of tractor dredging saw the Scaup abandoning the Mersehead and Barnhourie Sands in January 1994 in favour of the northern part of the Inner Solway around Powfoot and Blackshaw Bank, from which Quinn *et al.* (1997) concluded that, as cockle discards were no longer as readily available on Mersehead Sands, the Scaup had reverted to their preferred prey (mussels) around Powfoot and Blackshaw. Since then, the principal feeding area of the 2,000–2,800-strong Greater Scaup flock has continued to be centred on the outer edge of Blackshaw Bank throughout the winter months, with the birds moving into channels off Carsethorn and Powillimount with the ebb tide, where they are often to be found roosting and dabbling in shallow water over the low-tide period (pers. obs.). Very few Scaup were found over Mersehead and Barnhourie Sands during boat-based surveys, and there was no significant overlap in the distribution of Scaup and Common Scoter. The only substantive flock recorded at sea during these surveys was one of 350–400 birds seen twice in November and December 2001 in water depths of 13 m, approximately 2 km east of the main scoter-

feeding area, where they had presumably drifted with the tide.

#### *Discussion*

The Scottish side of the Solway Firth supports a nationally important population of Common Scoters. Its roles as a migration staging point from early May to mid June, and as a moult site between early July and mid September are particularly significant. The scoters are dependent on bivalve molluscs, which occur in vast numbers in the fine, muddy sandbanks of Mersehead and Barnhourie Sands. Common Scoters feed mainly during the flood-/high-tide period, when bivalves are at their most accessible, and then typically move out into deeper waters to roost a few kilometres off the Scottish coast. This tide-assisted movement between roosting and feeding areas, covering an average 22 km every 12 hours, would appear to be relatively efficient in terms of the species' energy requirements, which is particularly important during the July to September moult period.

Most of this feeding area is situated within the Upper Solway Flats and Marshes SSSI. This area is designated as a Ramsar site of international importance, and also as a Special Protection Area under the Birds Directive. These designations were made on the basis of various qualifying factors, including the support which the area provides to nationally and internationally important numbers of certain bird species. There was no recognition at the time of designation of the value of the resource in terms of the support which it provides for Common Scoters, and it is important that this now be rectified so that appropriate conservation measures can be devised, particularly with regard to any future commercial shellfish exploitation. In this respect, there is no evidence of the kind of beneficial relationship between commercial shellfishing and Common Scoter numbers that is claimed for the Greater Scaup that also inhabit the Solway.

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124. A large flock of Common Scoters *Melanitta nigra* in flight over the Solway (looking northeast across Blackshaw Bank, with the power station at Chapelcross, Dumfries & Galloway, in the background), September 2001.

# The status of inland-breeding Great Cormorants in England

Stuart E. Newson, John H. Marchant,  
Graham R. Ekins and Robin M. Sellers



Alan Harris

**ABSTRACT** Since the establishment of a tree-nesting colony of Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* at Abberton Reservoir, Essex, in 1981, the inland-breeding population in England has increased considerably and numbered at least 2,096 breeding pairs in 2005. This population is thought to have been founded by Continental birds of the race *sinensis*, although an increasing proportion of Cormorants of the nominate race from coastal colonies in England and Wales may have contributed to its development. Increasing numbers of feeding Cormorants are now attracted to inland waters in England, intensifying the conflict between Cormorants and fisheries. This prompted Defra to announce a 'new' policy in September 2004, which increased the number of Cormorants that could be killed under licence. It is not known how the change in policy is affecting breeding populations.



Prior to 1981, Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* (hereafter referred to simply as 'Cormorants') in England rarely attempted to breed away from coastal cliffs, stacks and offshore islands. This paper charts the development of nesting at alternative sites (termed 'inland', although a number are close to estuaries or open coasts). The first documented record of inland tree-nesting by Cormorants in England occurred in East Anglia during the 1540s (Coward 1928). Until the 1940s, inland breeding was reported from just six sites, in Cumbria, Dorset, Kent, Norfolk (two) and Suffolk (Babington 1884–1886; Mansel-Pleydell 1888; Seago 1977; Taylor *et al.* 1981; Stott *et al.* 2002). Pinioned birds and their fully winged offspring are also known to have bred at St James's Park in London (Homes *et al.* 1957). At several of these sites, human persecution is thought to have curtailed breeding activity. The relative inaccessibility of coastal colonies in England probably allowed the coastal, cliff-nesting population to remain at a reasonably high level during this period. Although historical data are scarce, there were an estimated 1,154 pairs of coastal-breeding Cormorants, all believed to be of the nominate race *P. c. carbo*, in England in 1969–70 (Cramp & Simmons 1977). Repeat surveys in 1985–88 and 1998–2000 suggested coastal populations of approximately 1,435 and 1,564 breeding pairs

respectively (Lloyd *et al.* 1991; Mitchell *et al.* 2004).

### Growth of the European population

In continental Europe, where birds of the race *Ph. c. sinensis* predominate, population levels were low during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and distribution restricted, most likely through a combination of habitat loss and persecution (van Eerden & Gregersen 1995). Throughout the twentieth century there were between 1,000 and 1,200 pairs breeding in The Netherlands, about 1,000 pairs in Denmark and fewer than 400 pairs in Germany (van Eerden & Gregersen 1995). In addition, pesticide contamination during the 1950s and 1960s is thought to have reduced breeding success, causing a further decline in the Continental population (Russell *et al.* 1996). Persecution in other parts of Europe is also believed to have reduced breeding numbers; for example, France had fewer than 60 pairs at the turn of the nineteenth century (Marion 1991). Growing concerns for these relatively small populations during the twentieth century led to protective legislation being introduced, first in The Netherlands (1965) and Denmark (1971), and then widely throughout Europe under Annex 1 of the EC Birds Directive (1979). Protective legislation for both European races, *carbo* and *sinensis*, was introduced in Britain under the Wildlife and

Countryside Act (1981).

Once the birds were protected, population growth was immediate and significant; for a detailed review, see Bregnballe (1996). In Denmark and The Netherlands the breeding population increased from 5,800 pairs in eight colonies in 1978, to 61,720 pairs in 116 colonies by 2005 (Bregnballe & Gregersen 1997; van Eerden & Zijlstra 1997; Eskildsen 2005; SOVON Dutch Centre for Field Ornithology unpubl.). Similar population growth



Robin Sellers

**125.** Until recently, the majority of Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* breeding in England were of the nominate form *Ph. c. carbo*, and nested on coastal cliffs, stacks and offshore islands; Ceann Leathad, Caithness, June 1996.

occurred in Sweden from 1980 (Lindell 1997), and in Germany and Poland in the early 1980s (Lindell *et al.* 1995). By the mid 1980s, Cormorants were extending their breeding range into central Europe and along the Baltic Sea coast (Lindell *et al.* 1995). During this period, numbers of wintering Cormorants in England were increasing (Sellers 1991) and, in 1981, an inland tree-nesting colony was established at Abberton Reservoir in Essex (Ekins 1989).

The establishment of an inland-breeding population of Cormorants in England between 1981 and 1995 has been well documented (Sellers *et al.* 1997). Although a large proportion of inland colonies were monitored between 1998 and 2002 during *Seabird 2000* (Mitchell *et al.* 2004), the subsequent development of the inland population in England (from 1995 onwards) has not been covered adequately. It is relevant to point out that inland breeding has also taken place in Scotland and Wales (in the latter country for centuries), and that there are tree-nesting Cormorants in Ireland. These colonies are, however, believed to be of the nominate race *carbo*, and are not part of the recent development in England discussed here. In this paper, we update Sellers *et al.* (1997) by presenting an overview of the colonisation and subsequent range expansion of the inland-breeding Cormorant population in England during 1981–2005. Our current understanding of the origins of inland-breeding Cormorants in England is discussed in relation to recent literature, and the findings of new analyses of ring-recoveries and colour-ringing data.

## Methods

### Colony counts

Counts of apparently occupied nests (AON), defined as nests in use and sufficiently finished to hold one or more eggs (Bregnballe & Lorentsen 2006), were obtained through a number of sources: (a) county bird reports and correspondence with County

Recorders; (b) the BTO Heronries Census; and (c) personal communication with birdwatchers, ringers and reserve or site managers. Following Bregnballe & Lorentsen (2006), a colony is defined here as a group or groups of nests that are within 2 km of one another. Such groups are often referred to as 'sub-colonies'. A single nest is sufficient to be termed a colony as long as it is not located within 2 km of other colonies. While considerable effort has been made to compile a complete list of colonies, it is likely that some breeding attempts have been missed, because these have not been reported or details were unavailable at the time of writing. Despite the large and often conspicuous nest of this species, counts of AON are not necessarily straightforward. Where there was more than one count for a particular site and year, the largest count is reported here. The location of most sites referred to in this paper has already been published but locations are not disclosed in a few cases where observers or recorders have requested that confidentiality is maintained.

### Ring recoveries

Although there are many potential biases in recoveries from metal rings and from colour-ringing data for Cormorants, ringing provides an invaluable tool for examining the extent to which different populations have contributed to



Mark Collier

126. Established in 1981, the tree-nesting Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* colony at Abberton Reservoir, Essex (photographed here in 2004), grew from nine pairs to a maximum of 551 pairs in 1996.



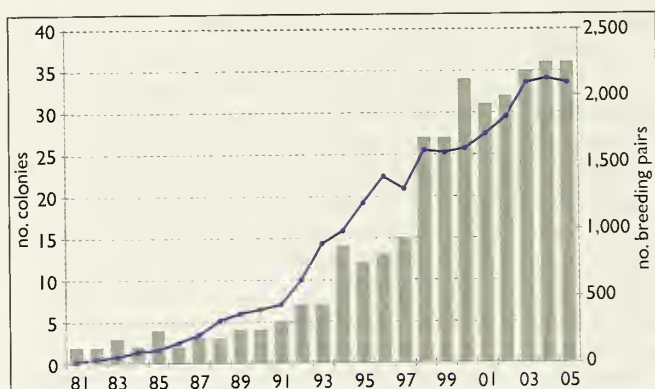


Fig. 1. Population growth (line) and number of inland Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* colonies (columns) in England between 1981 and 2005.

the development of the inland-breeding population in England. In this paper, we use data from two main sources: (a) recoveries from metal rings placed on chicks at coastal colonies in Britain & Ireland (1961–2005); and (b) recoveries and resightings of metal- and colour-ringed Cormorants ringed as chicks outside Britain & Ireland (1961–2005).

## Results and discussion

### Development of the inland-breeding population

Between 1981 and 2005, Cormorants bred successfully in one or more years at 58 inland sites in England, with a maximum of 36 colonies occupied in any one year. While breeding was actively discouraged at a number of these sites, the inland-breeding Cormorant population in England in 2005 is estimated to have been at least 2,096 breeding pairs (fig. 1, appendix 1).

During the first eight years of inland colonisation, the breeding population at Abberton Reservoir grew rapidly from nine to 310 pairs

(fig. 2). Abberton was the only site at which a colony was established successfully between 1981 and 1988, although confirmed breeding was reported during these years from a further six sites, in Cambridgeshire, Cornwall, Middlesex, Norfolk and Staffordshire (fig. 3a). From 1989 to 1994, when growth of the colony at Abberton was showing signs of slowing, a further eight colonies were established in England: Haweswater (Cumbria), Lower Derwent Valley (East Yorkshire), Walthamstow Reservoirs (Essex), Stodmarsh and Dungeness (Kent; the latter was a ground-nesting colony), Rutland Water (Leicestershire & Rutland), Deeping St James (Lincolnshire) and Besthorpe Gravel-pits (Nottinghamshire). Short-lived attempts at colonisation were reported from a further six sites between 1989 and 1994 (fig. 3b).

The period between 1995 and 2000 was characterised by rapid growth of existing colonies and further expansion, with new colonies established at a further 13 sites. This included the formation of the following tree-nesting colonies: Harrold–Odell Country Park (Bedfordshire), Aldermaston Gravel-pits (Berkshire), Chain Corner, Ouse Washes (Cambridgeshire), Drakelow Wildfowl Reserve (Derbyshire), Rye Harbour (East Sussex), Whel-drake Ings (East Yorkshire), Swithland Reservoir (Leicestershire & Rutland), Holkham (Norfolk), Earls Barton Gravel-pits (Northamptonshire), Stanton Harcourt (Oxfordshire), a confidential

site in Staffordshire, Loompit Lake (Suffolk) and Coombe Abbey Country Park (Warwickshire). In addition, successful but short-lived breeding was reported from a further 17 sites between 1995 and 2000 (fig. 3c). These included Willington Gravel-pits (Derbyshire), where breeding on a pylon was reported for the first time in England, in 1998 (James & Key 2001), although breeding here was subsequently discouraged. Illegal shooting of Cormorants at the colonies of Besthorpe and at

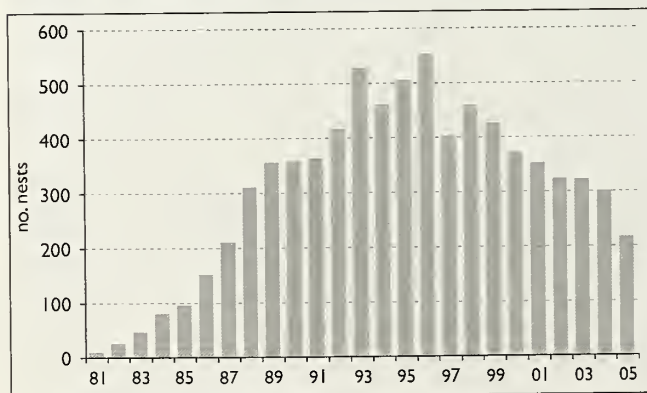
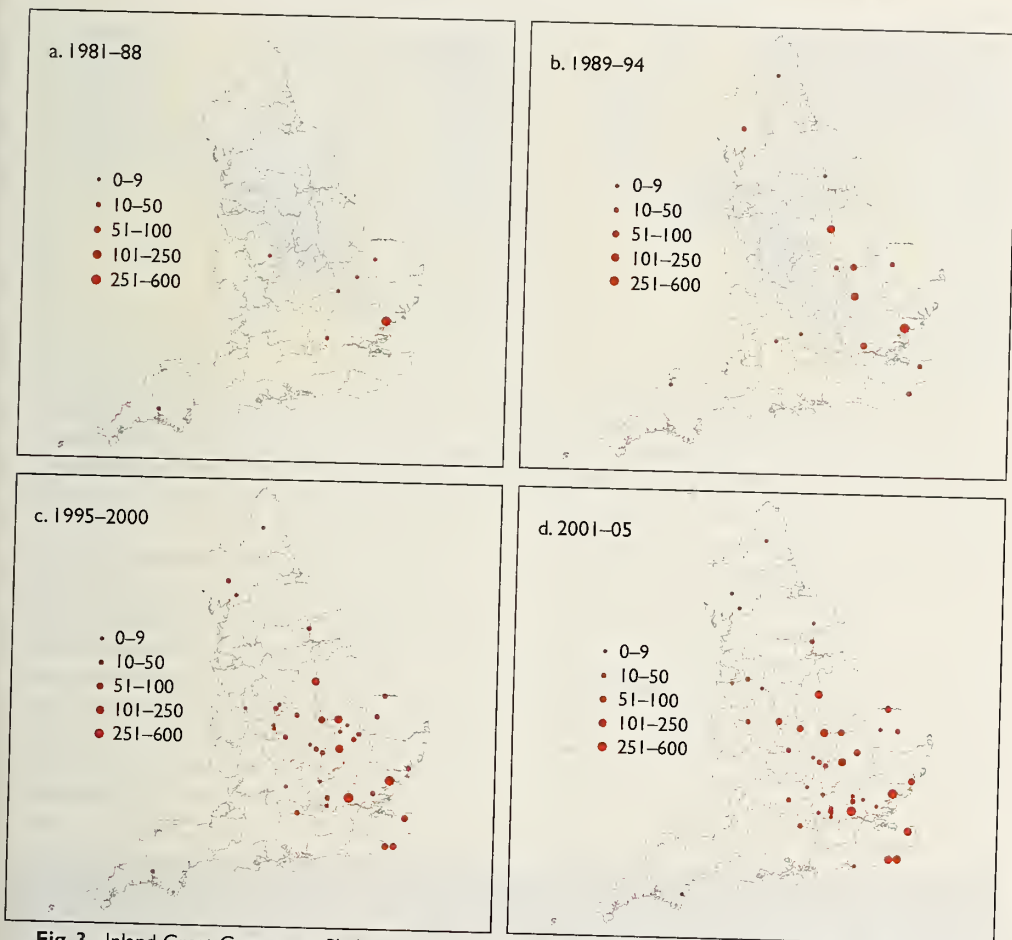


Fig. 2. Colonisation and development of the Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* colony at Abberton Reservoir, Essex, from 1981 to 2005.



**Fig. 3.** Inland Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* colonies in England with successful breeding in one or more years. These maps show the extent to which the number of colonies increased during the periods 1981-88 (a), 1989-94 (b), 1995-2000 (c), and 2001-05 (d). Dot size indicates number of Apparently Occupied Nests at each site. Confidential sites are shown centrally within their counties.

Deeping St James, in 2000 at least, is thought to have influenced breeding numbers at those sites.

During 2001-05, growth at the older colonies, including Abberton Reservoir, Paxton Gravel-pits (Cambridgeshire) and Besthorpe, stabilised or declined, while growth continued at the new colonies established during the previous five years. During this time, further colonies became established, at Rostherne Mere (Cheshire), at a confidential site in Norfolk and at Castle Howard (West Yorkshire). Short-lived breeding was reported from a further 14 sites between 2001 and 2005 (fig. 3d).

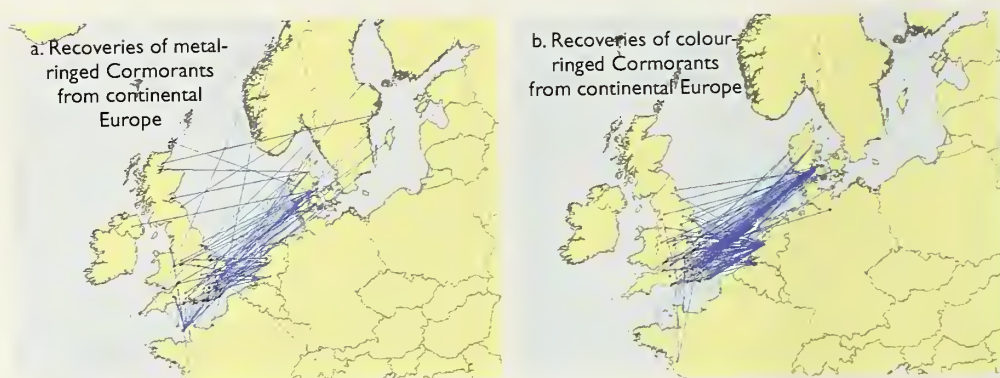
#### Origin of inland-breeding Cormorants

Population modelling work examining the growth rate of the Abberton colony during 1981-88 showed that there must have been sig-

nificant immigration into the colony at this time (Newson 2000). Evidence for immigration to this and other inland sites in England from the Continent during both the breeding and the non-breeding season is provided by recoveries and resightings of metal- and colour-ringed Cormorants ringed at *sinensis* colonies, principally in The Netherlands and Denmark (fig. 4). These include 16 Cormorants ringed at colonies in The Netherlands, six in Denmark, one in Germany and one in Sweden, which have been present or reported breeding at established tree-nesting colonies in England (between April and June).

Although there is evidence that Continental birds (*sinensis*) have influenced the development of an inland-breeding Cormorant population in England considerably, ringed Cormorants of the nominate form *carbo*, origi-





**Fig. 4.** Recoveries and resightings of Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* ringed in predominantly *Ph. c. sinensis* colonies in continental Europe and reported in Britain or Ireland outside the breeding season, between July and March. Birds marked with metal rings are shown in fig. 4a, while colour-ringed birds are shown in fig. 4b. These maps include Cormorants on spring and autumn passage as well as wintering birds.

nating from British colonies, have also been observed at inland colonies during the breeding season (between April and June). These have included three birds from St Margaret's Island (Pembrokeshire), two from Grune Point (Cumbria) and one from the Farne Islands (Northumberland). The origin of all colour- and metal-ringed birds breeding at inland colonies in England is shown in fig. 5. Considering the small number of Cormorants that have been colour-ringed at coastal colonies in England and Wales, the influence of British

*carbo* is likely to be far greater than these limited data suggest.

Further confirmation that mixed colonies of *carbo* and *sinensis* occur at inland sites in England comes from DNA analysis. Goostrey *et al.* (1998) used microsatellite markers to compare the genotypes of individuals, and analysed feather samples from 78 chicks in 1997; they found both genotypes in the same colony, at Abberton Reservoir and at at least four other, more recent colonies. Similar findings have been provided through mitochon-



Bill Baston

**127.** Between 1981 and 2005, Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* have bred successfully in one or more years at 58 inland sites in England, with a maximum of 36 colonies occupied in any one year. Although breeding has been actively discouraged at a number of these sites, the inland-breeding population was estimated to be in the region of 2,096 breeding pairs in 2005. This photograph shows an adult and a juvenile in Norfolk, June 2003.



**Fig. 5.** This shows the origins of Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* ringed at coastal *Ph. c. carbo* colonies in Wales, England or Sweden (red lines), or at *Ph. c. sinensis* colonies in The Netherlands or Denmark, and found at inland colonies in England during the breeding season, April–June (blue lines).

drial-DNA sequencing (Winney *et al.* 2001). In 1998, field assessment based on physical differences between the two races also suggested a mixed population at Abberton (Newson 2000); museum work examining anatomical differences between *carbo* and *sinensis* was described by Newson *et al.* (2004). However, there is evidence that the proportion of *carbo* and *sinensis* breeding at Abberton, and now at other inland colonies in England, may have changed over time. The percentage of *carbo* at six inland colonies in 1998 shows a strong correlation with the age of the colony, with older colonies such as Abberton having a higher proportion of *carbo* (fig. 6). This may suggest a mechanism whereby inland colonies are founded by *sinensis*, but an increasing proportion of *carbo* join these colonies as they develop. Without monitoring the change in these proportions over time, however, it is not possible to prove that there was not a difference from the outset.

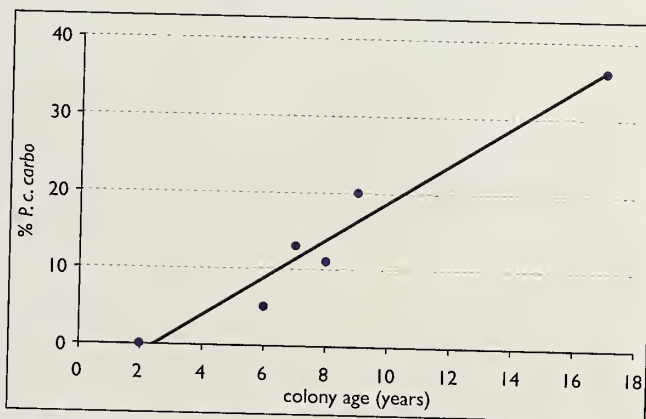
Analyses of colour-ringing data from Abberton have shown that birds fledged from this colony at least have played an important role in the establishment and development of other inland colonies during the period 1989–94 (Ekins 1996). Cormorants are faithful to their natal colony, but as a colony nears its carrying capacity an increasing proportion of

(mostly) younger birds breed elsewhere, either by moving to existing colonies or establishing new ones. Between 1993 and 1996, about 7% of Cormorants hatched at Abberton dispersed (Newson 2000), but the proportion breeding (or attempting to breed) away from the colony increased to 12% in 1997 and 18% in 1998 (Newson 2000).

The establishment of new inland colonies tends to be at sites already used by Cormorants as night-time roosts and often increasingly during the summer months by immature birds (Newson 2000). Observations of Cormorants displaying and carrying sticks and of nest-building attempts by young birds are often made in years prior to successful breeding. In addition, perhaps because of the similarity in breeding requirements between Cormorants and Grey Herons *Ardea cinerea*, a large proportion of Cormorant colonies have been established within or alongside heronries.

#### The future for breeding Cormorants in the UK

Cormorants are perceived as a threat to inland commercial fisheries, particularly where groups of birds gather to spend the winter, and the growth of the inland Cormorant population in England has heightened this problem. Until 2004, licences were issued to fisheries to kill small numbers of Cormorants in England (between 200 and 500 in total each year), to help to reinforce scaring measures. Following further pressure from fisheries, however, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural



**Fig. 6.** Based on field observations at six inland Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* colonies in England during the 1998 breeding season (including Abberton Reservoir in Essex, the oldest colony studied), this shows the relationship between number of years since establishment of and percentage of breeding cormorants identified as *Ph. c. carbo* (as opposed to *Ph. c. sinensis*). Based on these data, a Spearman rank-order correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.98$  ( $P < 0.001$ ) was obtained.



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128. Feather samples taken from Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* chicks at Abberton Reservoir and at four other, more recently founded inland colonies in 1997 have confirmed that both the nominate form and the Continental race *Ph. c. sinensis* are breeding at inland colonies in England.

Affairs (Defra) announced a new policy in September 2004 for controlling Cormorants. This allows licences to be issued to cull Cormorants (i.e. to reduce the population level); the number of birds that could be culled was increased to 3,000 for two years following the announcement, after which an annual control of up to 2,000 birds is to be maintained. Each applica-

tion for a licence is considered on its own merits, but it is undoubtedly easier to obtain a licence now than in previous years.

The Government's decision to intensify the cull was based on the findings of population modelling, which suggested that increased control would decrease the inland wintering population (Central Science Laboratory 2004). However, Defra has not commissioned work to explore how increased levels of control will affect breeding populations. The UK Government has an international responsibility under the EU Birds Directive to ensure a favourable conservation status of breeding Cormorants in the UK. As we show here, inland waters in

England support Cormorants from a number of breeding populations outside the breeding season. These include coastal-breeding *carbo*, mainly from England and Wales, *sinensis* from the Continent, and both races from the developing inland-breeding population in England. At present, we do not know the likely influence of the increased level of control on the inland-

Roy Tipper



129. Following pressure from fisheries, Defra announced a new policy in September 2004 for the control of Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo*. This increased the number of Cormorants that could be controlled to 3,000 in the first two years, after which an annual control of up to 2,000 birds will be maintained. Currently, it is not known how this change in policy will affect the inland- or coastal-breeding populations. This photograph shows a Cormorant of the form *Ph. c. sinensis*, Quinta do Lago, Algarve, Portugal, February 2004.

and coastal-breeding populations, for which annual monitoring is required.

While the inland-breeding Cormorant population in England, predominantly *sinensis* as shown here, has grown considerably since 1981, our long-established coastal-breeding population of nominate *carbo* has remained relatively stable and is declining in parts of its range; and Great Cormorant remains an Amber-listed species in the UK (Debout *et al.* 1995; Budworth *et al.* 2000; Mitchell *et al.* 2004). Simple population models suggest that coastal colonies, which fledge considerably fewer chicks per brood (Newson *et al.* 2005) and have lower annual survival rates than inland colonies (Newson 2000), are more susceptible to natural variation in these parameters, without an artificially increased level of mortality. At this time, we have little understanding of the level of culling at which long-term population decline in the coastal-breeding *carbo* population in the UK would be apparent.

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**130.** Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* are very site faithful, and frequently return to breed in the same colony from which they fledged. However, as a colony grows towards the maximum size that can be supported in the area, an increasing proportion of younger individuals disperse to breed or attempt to breed elsewhere. This photo shows a first-winter bird of the race *sinensis*, Greece, February 2004.

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**131.** Colour-ringing of Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* at Abberton Reservoir, Essex, has shown that birds from this colony played an important role in the establishment and development of other inland colonies in England during the period 1989–94. Colour-ringed birds from Abberton have also been seen during the breeding season in Cormorant colonies in The Netherlands, Belgium and France, and it appears likely that some birds from this colony have nested on the Continent.

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**Appendix 1.** Number of breeding pairs of Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* at inland colonies in England, summarised by county, for the period 1981–2005. The number of established colonies in each county is listed in the right-hand column. Totals for sites where breeding was unsuccessful are excluded.

	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	Colonies
Bedfordshire																										
Berkshire																	1	4	4	16	17	24	31	31	27	2
Buckinghamshire																2	9	14	16	26	34	33	32	46	2	
Cambridgeshire																						3	6	6	2	
Cheshire	2	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	9	18	35	76	133	185	184	223	235	229	225	199	187	151	198	184	248	5
Cornwall																							7	22	3	
Cumbria					1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	1	
Derbyshire									1	2	16	13	13	26	41	50	0	1	1	0	5	0	11	2		
Devon																	4	24	46	55	86	96	100	2		
East Sussex																										
East Yorkshire																										
Essex	9	25	46	79	95	151	210	310	355	356	366	444	584	546	617	727	636	679	598	623	627	619	680	689	558	5
Greater London																										
Hertfordshire																										
Kent																		2	2	0	2	2	1	1	2	3
Leicestershire														31	88	94	140	146	151	151	154	155	194	238	232	2
Lincolnshire																		2	15	18	28	40	53	45	38	1
Middlesex																										
Norfolk							1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	6	11	15	20	33	37	42	42	2
Northamptonshire							4	4	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	35	54	57	45	55	83	96	4
Northumberland																		7	3	13	27	30	31	30	2	
North Yorkshire																										
Nottinghamshire																										
Oxfordshire																										
Rutland										10	33	74	92	114	140	181	173	180	178	98	78	110	120	100	140	1
Staffordshire	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	6	13	20	33	46	27	51	39	68	83	136	150	145	122	1
Suffolk																										
Warwickshire																										
West Midlands																										
Wiltshire																										
Annual total	10	26	48	80	98	152	212	315	368	398	435	619	893	986	1,198	1,394	1,303	1,589	1,574	1,603	1,713	1,841	2,097	2,126	2,096	58



# Notes

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## The breeding birds of Sule Skerry and Stack Skerry

At the fringe of Scotland's northern and western coastlines, an arc of remote islands forms some of the most important seabird nurseries in the North Atlantic. The islands' isolation combined with frequent inclement weather means that only small numbers of visitors have reached the more inaccessible of the islands (and even fewer have actually managed to land there); yet most, if not all, will have been impressed by the abundant seabirds encountered. Since 1975, two of these islands, Sule Skerry and Stack Skerry, to the west of Orkney, have been the target of a major seabird monitoring and ringing programme that continues today.

### Sule Skerry

Lying 56 km north of Whiten Head and 73 km northwest of Dunnet Head on mainland Scotland's north coast, Sule Skerry is one of Britain's most inaccessible and least-visited islands, and home to one of the largest seabird colonies in Scotland. The name 'Sule' is thought to derive from the Norse word *Sula*, meaning 'Solan' or 'Gannet', or perhaps from the older name of 'Seal Skerry' (the island is also home to large numbers of Grey Seals *Halichoerus grypus*) (Tomison 1904). Sule Skerry covers just 14.2 ha (35 acres) and rises to a maximum height of 15 m above the high-water mark. This rocky outcrop comprises banded gneiss with a shallow

soil base in the centre; Sea Mayweed *Tripleurospermum maritimum* is the dominant ground cover, along with pockets of Common Orache *Atriplex patula* and Common Scurvygrass *Cochlearia officinalis*.

The first detailed ornithological records for Sule Skerry date back to 1896, when James Tomison began to document the birds encountered during his seven years as resident light-keeper (Tomison 1904). In 1901, Tomison considered Common Guillemot *Uria aalge* to be uncommon and no Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis* were breeding, while the only Northern Gannets *Morus bassanus* (the species is hereafter referred to as 'Gannet') he encountered were sick or injured birds. During the intervening years, there have been changes to both the diversity and the populations of seabirds breeding on the island. Common Guillemots now number in excess of 7,000 pairs, while both Fulmar and Gannet are established breeding species. Tomison recorded between six and ten pairs of Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla*, which had increased to some 1,200 pairs in the 1970s and 80s but have since declined to fewer than 1,000 pairs. Other species were more numerous a century ago; for example, Black Guillemots *Cepphus grylle* bred regularly then but ceased to breed in the mid 1980s.

Today, Sule Skerry is a particularly important breeding site for Puffins *Fratercula arctica* and supports approximately 10% of the entire British and Irish population (Mitchell *et al.* 2004). Other breeding seabirds include European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*, Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*, Great Skua *Stercorarius skua* and Razor-bill *Alca torda* (see table 1); a small colony of Gannets has become established in recent years and it seems likely that numbers will increase. Other breeding species



132. An aerial view of Sule Skerry, May 2005.

John Love

**Table 1.** Estimated numbers of breeding pairs of seabirds on Sule Skerry recorded during visits by the Sule Skerry Ringing Group in 1975, 1986, 1993 and 2005. Note that Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* experienced a significant failure in 2005, and only six pairs were located.

	1975	1986	1993	2005
Fulmar <i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	43	173	346	314
European Storm-petrel <i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>	<1000 <sup>a</sup>	200–500 <sup>b</sup>	400 <sup>b</sup>	450 <sup>c</sup>
Northern Gannet <i>Morus bassanus</i>	0	0	0	77
Shag <i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	430	874	701	6 <sup>d</sup>
Great Skua <i>Stercorarius skua</i>	0	0	1	2
Herring Gull <i>Larus argentatus</i>	48	30	30	20–25
Greater Black-backed Gull <i>Larus marinus</i>	14	22	22	15–20
Kittiwake <i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	1,163	973	710	c. 500
Arctic Tern <i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	175	100+	<100	0
Common Guillemot <i>Uria aalge</i>	–	3,462	7,178	–
Razorbill <i>Alca torda</i>	–	40	75	<50
Black Guillemot <i>Cephus grylle</i>	3	1	0	0
Puffin <i>Fratercula arctica</i>	44,289	42,456	–	34,348

Key: <sup>a</sup> using observations

<sup>b</sup> using ringing activity

<sup>c</sup> using echolocation

<sup>d</sup> possibly due to poor winter weather conditions

include Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*, Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*, Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* and, occasionally, Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*. Leach's Storm-petrels *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* have not been confirmed as breeding on the island, but there was a reported breeding record in 1933 (Robinson 1934), and a pair was killed at the lighthouse in 1908 (Robinson 1930).

### Stack Skerry

Stack Skerry (or Sule Stack) is situated 8 km southwest of Sule Skerry and is home to an important Gannet colony. It is divided into two halves, each rising to 40 m at the highest point and together covering approximately 2.5 ha (6 acres). This island is undoubtedly one of the most remote locations in Britain and very few landings have been made owing to the constant swell and hazardous rocks (Fisher & Vevers 1943). The numbers and species diversity of seabirds on Stack Skerry are considerably lower than those on Sule Skerry. Apart from Gannets, it currently holds breeding populations of Shag, Kittiwake, Common Guillemot and Razorbill.

### Bird ringing on Sule Skerry and Stack Skerry

Owing to its inaccessibility, relatively few birds were ringed on Sule Skerry before 1975. In 1935, H. W. Robinson ringed at least 100 Arctic Terns *Sterna paradisaea*; in 1949, Ian Pennie ringed at least 17 Shags; and, in 1967 and 1968, Dave Stark and Jim Williams ringed 150 Puffins

and a handful of other species. Expeditions by the Sule Skerry Ringing Group (SSRG) began in 1975, when the BTO encouraged ringers to focus on seabirds, particularly auks, which until that time were under-represented in terms of the numbers being ringed in Britain. The SSRG established a programme of organised and systematic ringing, collecting data in accordance with the BTO's Scientific Strategy, which demands a methodical programme of ringing and recaptures to generate recoveries for monitoring movements and survival.

While attempting to meet these aims, the SSRG has identified other specific priorities which now form a part of the ongoing programme:

- monitoring Puffin burrows to estimate breeding population, density, breeding success and condition of chicks before (and after) fledging;
- monitoring the Gannet colony, established in 2003, and assessing breeding success, site fidelity, colony expansion and possible inter-specific competition with other seabirds;
- increasing the personnel available to continue long-term seabird studies on the island by training in ringing and monitoring techniques;
- collecting data on other birds, cetaceans and invertebrates on the island.

The SSRG has made several attempts to land on Stack Skerry during the last 30 years but has been thwarted by a combination of inclement weather and unco-operative fishermen. In 2002,



Stuart Newson



**133.** For many years, the Sule Skerry Ringing Group had made use of a 110-year-old double-walled shed that was erected originally for workmen building the lighthouse for Charles and David Stevenson in 1892–94. This woodworm-ridden structure was destroyed by gales in early 2005, but fortunately it has since been possible for the Group to use a newer building as base camp, seen here to the left of the lighthouse.

however, an enthusiastic and experienced boatman, with a biological background and a genuine interest in conservation, was recruited and this significantly improved the chances of landing on the island. Aided by good weather, the first successful landing by a small survey and ringing party was made in July 2002. In this year, 94 Gannet chicks were ringed on the South Rock from approximately 100 pairs breeding there; one of the ringed birds subsequently became a victim of the MV *Prestige* oil spill in northeast Spain the following December. In 2003, over 1,100 Gannet chicks were ringed and two have subsequently been recovered from Portugal. A landing in 2005 resulted in 824

Northern Isles.

#### *Population estimates and movements* *Puffin*

Estimates of the size of the Puffin colony on Sule Skerry have varied widely over the years. Based on visual observations, Stark (1967) estimated the colony to contain c. 60,000 breeding pairs. In 1975, SSRG employed random-quadrat techniques to count the number of burrows within set areas and estimated the population to be 44,289 breeding pairs. A comparable (and independent) estimate was obtained in 1998 by using a number of linear-transect burrow counts. Observations since the 1970s suggest that numbers have declined slightly over the last 30 years, and the potential breeding population is considered to be between 30,000 and 40,000 pairs.

Considering the number of Puffins that have been ringed since 1975, there have been relatively few recoveries, most being dead birds washed up on beaches in Scotland and the Mediterranean. There have been just 17 recaptures of Puffins on Sule Skerry that were ringed away from the island, and only seven Sule Skerry birds

Jez Blackburn



**134.** Puffins *Fratercula arctica* on Sule Skerry, one of the island's most important breeding seabird species.

have been found at other British colonies. The *Prestige* oil spill in December 2003 resulted in recovery of 11 Sule Skerry-ringed Puffins, while 29 have been either shot or killed in the Faeroe Islands. In 2005, six birds that had originally been marked in 1975 were caught or found dead, one of which had not previously been recaptured during any of the 17 intervening expeditions. The current longevity record for Puffin on Sule Skerry now stands at 30 years and eight days, just eight days short of the current national longevity record.

### Gannet

Early records suggest that Gannets were breeding on Stack Skerry as early as 1710 (Gurney 1914), but it was not until 1890 that the first estimate recorded 3,500 pairs (Fisher & Vevers 1943). Further counts in 1904 and 1914 revealed a population in excess of 4,000 pairs (Fisher & Vevers 1944) and Wynne Edwards *et al.* (1936) estimated the population to be 8,000, although it is not entirely clear whether these estimates referred to individual birds, nests or pairs. Malcolm Stewart, who landed on the northern half of the island in July 1937, estimated 3,500 pairs (Stark 1967) and when only 2,010 pairs were found in 1949 (Williamson & Boswall 1960), fears of a significant decline were confirmed. The cause of this decline and the reasons for its subsequent turnaround remain unknown. James Fisher and W. J. Eggeling found 2,800 pairs in 1960 (Williamson & Boswall 1960), suggesting that numbers were already starting to recover. The highest count made during the last 30 years was in 1985, when 5,900 nests were recorded, although this figure was derived from 'moderate-quality photographs' (Mitchell *et al.* 2004), so the accuracy is open to question. More recently, aerial counts revealed 4,888 nests in 1994 (Murray & Wanless 1997) and 4,618 nests in 2004 (Wanless *et al.* 2005). In 2005, a survey employing a combination of video footage and photographs, supported by counts from boat- and ground-based observers, estimated 3,600  $\pm$  300 nests.

Currently, much of the colony is to be found on the North Rock, where birds breed in a densely packed colony on areas of flat rock. The South Rock currently houses just 110 pairs, however, and there is ample scope for the colony to expand here. Future surveys will assess changes in numbers and extent of the colony.

Recoveries of Gannets ringed on Stack Skerry will compliment current studies of Gannets ringed elsewhere in Britain. Ringing will also provide information on survival and inter-colony movements and may be able to identify the origins of birds that are affected by environmental incidents such as oil spills and storm 'wrecks', highlighting the impact of such events on this particular colony or the population as a whole (Grantham 2004).

### Acknowledgments

The success of each expedition relies on teamwork and the specialist skills and attributes of a great many people, who are too numerous to mention individually here. We would, however, like to thank Bob Anderson and Angus Budge, skipper and second mate of the *MV Halton*, whose expertise in safely getting people on and off these islands was essential to the ultimate success of these expeditions. The group is also grateful to SNH and the Northern Lighthouse Board for permission to access the islands.

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135. The Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* colony on Stack Skerry, with *MV Halton* in the background, July 2005.

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## Recovery of Peregrine Falcon after hitting the sea

On 24th June 2006, I was leading a group of naturalists along the coast path on the east cliffs of Portland, Dorset, near Southwell village. The resident pair of Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus* was pursuing Feral Pigeons *Columba livia* over the sea, and we watched the Peregrines for about 30 minutes, during which time three or four separate pigeon flocks were attacked. The falcons' tactics involved the male making repeated stoops at a flock until one pigeon was separated from the rest. This unlucky bird would then be pursued by the female until both were over the coast, when the Peregrine would attempt a kill without risk of losing the pigeon in the sea. Each pursuit that we watched resulted in the pigeon managing to get away, with one bird flying at full speed underneath a boulder to escape its pursuer.

After several unsuccessful attacks, the female attempted to catch a particularly slow-flying pigeon while still over the sea. The pigeon was hit in flight and grasped by the female, while the male circled high overhead. However, with the pigeon firmly in her talons, the female failed to recover fully from her dive and clipped the surface of the sea. At first, it appeared that she would be able to continue flying low over the sea, but it then became apparent that she was too heavy to continue, and had to land on the sea surface. For a few seconds she floated, wings outstretched, and then started 'swimming', making a slow and laborious journey across the 300 m or so of sea back to the rocks on the coast. She employed what can best be described

as a 'butterfly stroke', using her wings in vigorous flapping motions to propel herself across the sea. She was soon joined by two of her recently fledged young, which circled around her, calling constantly. It was not clear whether they were distressed at the sight of their mother in trouble, or were just begging for the pigeon they had watched her catch. The male, which had been nearby during the hunt, was now nowhere to be seen, and did not reappear during the next 30 minutes while we watched the drama unfold.

It took the female Peregrine about 20 minutes to reach the shoreline, her journey being significantly lengthened by the current, which moved her south along the coast towards Portland Bill. Unfortunately, the last few metres were hidden from our view behind the next headland, but we assumed that she climbed a rock on the shoreline and dried off in the hot sun. The coast here is composed of large limestone boulders from previous quarrying and cliff-falls, so the bird would have been able to climb out of the sea. As we left the site, we found that the two youngsters had returned to their usual ledge; presumably the female had not managed to hang on to the pigeon during the swim ashore, although perhaps she did so initially, which might explain why she did not immediately take off again from the surface? Ratcliffe (1993) stated that 'Peregrines occasionally pick prey from water, when they have chased it in, or when it is wounded, and they will also retrieve kills which have fallen into the water.'

The following morning, we returned to see if there was any sign of the unfortunate female. Unlike the previous day, which had been hot and sunny, there was constant light rain. We soon found the male Peregrine, sheltering on a cliff ledge; further along, we found the female, perched on another cliff ledge, facing inwards with her wings spread. Rainwater running off the cliff was showering over her plumage, which she dried occasionally with a vigorous shake. It was tempting to think that this was a deliberate activity to wash the salt from her plumage. Three days later, both adults were occupying

**Bob Ford**

*Nature Portfolio Image Library, PO Box 4439, Portland, Dorset DT5 1YT*

their usual perches and the two youngsters were soaring above the cliffs some distance away; all four birds appeared fit and well. I checked them again four weeks after the original incident and found both adults with one young still with them. The female was not seen hunting, although the male was observed passing food to her on the cliff, and once again was observed to hold her wings out when it started raining.

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## Peregrine Falcons nesting in central London

Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus* are now nesting in central London on a regular basis for the first time since reliable records began. The original population on the south coast was wiped out in the population crash of the 1960s but, during the 30 years that it took it to recover, there was an unprecedented increase in the size and scale of new buildings in urban areas. Thus, having reached the cliffs of Kent, Peregrines discovered that completely new suitable nest-sites were available on power stations close to the River Thames. Sightings farther up the river soon began to increase and, in 1996, birds were found to be roosting on the tower-like chimney of the disused Bankside power station, which was then being converted into the Tate Modern art gallery.

In 2001, breeding was recorded in the inner London area for the first time when Peregrines raised three young at Battersea power station, about 5 km southwest of the City; in the same year, another pair frequented the Millennium Dome, a similar distance to the east, although this site, like the Tate Modern, has proved to be unsuitable for breeding owing to the lack of suitable flat ledges. It was only a matter of time before a site in central London itself was occupied and, on 19th March 2003, a pair was seen roosting on a public building near Baker Street. During the next five days, the birds were seen mating on a residential tower block near Regent's Park and by 25th March the female was almost certainly incubating at that site.

This first attempt failed (for reasons unknown) and once the birds had departed, a nestbox was installed to improve shelter at the

site. The nestbox was resolutely ignored by the Peregrines when they returned in early 2004, however, and instead they made a scrape in some pea shingle which had been scattered in the open area adjacent to the nestbox. This time the birds were successful and the first of two chicks fledged on 14th June. Afterwards, the nestbox was modified by removing an inconvenient entrance 'step' and opening up one of its sides.

In March 2005, the central London birds had left the Regent's Park area and selected a new site on a tall residential building about 4 km away, close to the City. On 30th March, it was established that one egg had been laid (on bare concrete) and sightings of the female on the nest ledge continued for at least two more days. From our high-level vantage point, it was possible to observe all the nesting and roosting places in the central London area, and on 3rd April the birds were prospecting an alternative ledge on the roof of the Old Bailey, less than 1 km away. Here, a nest scrape was made in a tangle of waste rope and rubber matting, jammed precariously into a crevice at the edge of the roof, a choice of nesting material which does not appear to have been previously recorded. The female's behaviour immediately suggested that further laying was about to take place; by 5th April she was almost certainly incubating and this was confirmed on 8th when nest reliefs were seen twice. It was impossible (see plate 136) to count the eggs but it seems clear from the dates that they must have formed the remainder of the clutch which had so recently been started at the nearby City site. For





**136.** Female Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*, Old Bailey, central London, April 2005. The nest scrape lay among waste rope and other man-made materials.

three more days, incubation proceeded normally, but on 12th April the female was found lingering near the nest-site, which had become accidentally dislodged and destroyed. The following day, both birds were back at the Regent's Park (2004) site, showing all the signs that they would make yet another attempt. Since a webcam had been installed here in anticipation of further nesting, this was a particularly welcome and unexpected development. On about 26th April, the first of three eggs was duly laid in the modified nestbox and the birds became stars of the 2005 BBC 'Springwatch' television programme. All three hatched successfully and the first of three young birds fledged on 13th July.

Although the 2006 season started with one bird regularly visiting the Regent's Park site, by mid February both adults were again frequenting their 2005 City tower block, where some fresh pea shingle had probably made the site more attractive. By virtue of 1,000+ hours of observations, we were confident that the same individuals formed the pair for a fourth consecutive year. The female had finer than usual streaking on the upper breast, while the male could be distinguished by a combination of a brilliant-white breast and strikingly orange-yellow legs and cere; these characteristics helped us to track these individuals between the various nest-sites. In early March, they were seen displaying and mating at the Tate Modern and once again they nested successfully, the first of three chicks fledged on 12th June.

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It is interesting to note that although many Peregrines are now nesting on man-made structures, comparatively few are doing so in such close proximity to human habitation as the London birds, at both the Regent's Park and the City sites. Another intriguing aspect of their behaviour has been the regular use of the Tate Modern, for roosting, hunting and display/mating, regardless of the distance from the various nesting sites, up to 4 km away.

Detailed observations were made of these central London Peregrines, notably during their breeding attempts at the Regent's Park site, and we hope to publish this information in full in due course. In view of the fact that a number of pairs are now nesting in major cities worldwide, including New York and Chicago in the USA, some thought has been given as to how many may ultimately settle in central London. The area which lies within the Underground Circle Line and immediately adjacent to it covers approximately 50 km<sup>2</sup> and since Ratcliffe (1993) suggested that a density of 3–4 pairs per 100 km<sup>2</sup> is possible, then two pairs might be expected. There are, however, signs that a higher density may occur. During 2006, a new (single) bird was seen to be occupying the Regent's Park site on an occasional basis, unchallenged by the established pair at the City site 4 km away. In coastal areas, where conditions are favourable, spacing of only 2 km between nests is found not infrequently (pers. obs.). In an urban area such as this, there is no shortage of nest-sites or prey, chiefly Feral Pigeons *Columba livia*, and it seems quite likely that more than two pairs may ultimately nest in the central area, with a substantially greater number in Greater London as a whole.

#### Acknowledgments

Special thanks are due to Dick Treleaven, Ian Newton, Tony Duckett, Gina Johnson, Dave Morrison, Stuart Harrington, Des McKenzie, Andy Fisher and Dave Flint for their help in various ways. We would also like to thank the RSPB for help with travel arrangements, while this study would not have been possible without the help and co-operation of all those responsible for permitting access to strategically placed rooftops.

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## Peregrine Falcon retrieving prey from flock of Carrion Crows

On 13th January 2005, on the saltmarsh just west of Wigtown, Dumfries & Galloway, I witnessed an intriguing example of Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* behaviour when an immature female Peregrine was confronted by a flock of 18 Carrion Crows *Corvus corone* which was attempting to 'steal' the raptor's recently seized prey.

The Peregrine was stooped over an unplucked gull, probably a Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*, but was increasingly intimidated by the ever more bold behaviour of the crows. Initially, it attempted to shield the prey with an outspread wing and twisted the prey with a single foot, so that it could face the majority of the encircling flock. Although the Peregrine made several attempts to pluck its victim, it was almost prevented from doing so by the crows manoeuvring so tightly around it. Within a short while, it was completely encircled and stressed by the other birds' threatening gestures. In a final effort to retain control, the falcon spread both wings to cowl the prey, while dragging it away slightly under the grip of a single foot. With the falcon momentarily unbalanced, one Carrion Crow

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began pulling the Peregrine Falcon's tail as another pulled hard on the gull's outstretched wing. This had the effect of dislodging the falcon completely and forced it to move sideways.

Throughout the whole encounter I had the impression that the Peregrine was wet and tired; I anticipated that it would relinquish the prey entirely under the weight of such intimidation and this seemed to be confirmed when one of the crows itself began to pluck the gull. Within seconds, however, the Peregrine took off and seemed to fly away from the crow flock, but as it did so it was instantly pursued by seven or eight crows. The Peregrine then swung round over the crows remaining on the ground, passing them several times and once making a swoop as if to strike. Soon all the corvids were airborne and, while vocalising in alarm, began to fly away from the vicinity of the gull. Eventually they all disappeared, at which point the Peregrine landed on its prey and resumed plucking in solitude.

I discussed the incident with the late Derek Ratcliffe prior to his death, and he suggested that he had never encountered a comparable example of this behaviour.

## Mixed singing in *Phylloscopus* warblers

Following Gordon Hopkins's note on a Willow Warbler with an unusual song (*Brit. Birds* 99: 580), I was reminded of two similar individuals I have encountered recently in Leicestershire. On 3rd May 2004, I heard a *Phylloscopus* warbler singing at Stoughton Airfield which began with approximately six to eight notes of Common Chiffchaff *Ph. collybita* song and then finished with the typical descending notes of a Willow Warbler *Ph. trochilus*. This bird sang almost constantly for a period of ten minutes using this distinctive series of notes. On 19th June 2005, I heard a similar song on allotments in the Aylestone Park area of Leicester; this time, however, the bird

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sometimes began its song with Chiffchaff-like notes and ended it with Willow Warbler-like ones and sometimes vice versa. Unfortunately, both birds were singing from dense hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* scrub and were not seen sufficiently well to confirm their identification as either Chiffchaff or Willow Warbler.

In addition, the *Leicestershire and Rutland Bird Report* for 2002 makes reference to a Common Chiffchaff at Pickworth Great Wood on June 1st 2002 which had 'an aberrant song, ending more like a Willow Warbler', while a similar mixed singer (which remained unidentified) was reported at Thurnby during the summer of 2005.

The note by Hopkins (2006) on a Willow Warbler singing its own song followed immediately by several notes of the song of Common Chiffchaff reminded me of a similar observation that I made in 1985 in Germany and of the

extended review of mixed singing in European passerines by Helb *et al.* (1985). The latter defined mixed singers as birds 'which in their full song extensively copy vocal patterns of one alien species'; the alien song may be produced



alternately with the bird's own song, or fragments of both songs are combined into a single phrase. Mixed singing has been recorded among many European passerines and is most widespread in Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* (reproducing Short-toed Treecreeper's *C. brachydactyla* song) and Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia* (singing the song of Common Nightingale *L. megarhynchos*). Baker & Boylan (1999) reported frequent mixed singing in a population of Lazuli Buntings *Passerina amoena*, Indigo Buntings *P. cyanea* and hybrids between the two in Wyoming, USA. Several more cases of mixed singers reproducing the songs of Willow Warbler and Common Chiffchaff have been reported (for an overview see Helb *et al.* 1985; see also above and two instances reported in the *Cambridgeshire Bird Report*: 2002 (p. 101) and 2004 (p. 128)). They remain scarce, however, unlike the high proportion of mixed singers in some populations of Eurasian Treecreepers and Thrush Nightingales (Thielcke 1986; Lille 1988). Although hybrids between Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff have been assumed in some cases, it is more likely that most (or indeed all?) of those birds belong to one species, as has been shown for mixed-singing Eurasian Treecreepers and Thrush Nightingales (Helb *et al.* 1985; Thielcke 1986;

Lille 1988). Indeed, for most records, plumage features of mixed-singing *Phylloscopus* warblers indicate that the birds are Willow Warblers. It is understood that mixed singing results from a defect in normal song learning, particularly in cases when the copying species is rare and young birds learn erroneously from the more common copied species (Helb *et al.* 1985; Baptista & Kroodsmas 2001).

#### Acknowledgment

I am grateful to Christine Alder of the BirdLife International library in Cambridge for helping to access references.

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**EDITORIAL COMMENT** We shall not publish any further individual notes on this behaviour in *Phylloscopus* warblers unless they relate to particularly unusual circumstances.

## Hawfinches eating snow

During 25th–29th December 2005, up to three Hawfinches *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* visited a garden on the southern edge of Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire. They fed almost exclusively on the seeds of an Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* tree but did occasionally take seeds (principally sunflower seeds and peanuts) from a bird feeder and from the ground below the feeder.

On 26th December, snow fell to a depth of 2–3 cm and on three separate occasions I

watched a male Hawfinch picking and eating snowflakes from the tree branches. That they were pecking at the snow and not buds on the branches was confirmed when one male flew onto a wooden fence and continued to eat the snowflakes, which encrusted round its bill with the cold. It was evidently melting the snow in its mouth to drink. BWP does not mention this resort to snow as a water source to assist seed digestion.

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**EDITORIAL COMMENT** Ian Newton has commented that he has observed several species of finches eating snow in an outdoor aviary, and that the behaviour is probably not uncommon during snowfall, but it appears not to have been recorded previously.

## Farmland bird targets

The publication of *The State of the UK's Birds 2005* (Eaton *et al.* 2006) prompts questions about the value of Government targets for farmland-bird recovery as exemplified by the associated indicators. The report states clearly (p. 2) that 'farmland birds... have yet to begin recovery from the large decline of the 1970s and '80s'. Elsewhere (p. 25), we are told that the farmland bird indicator 'has fallen to less than half of its 1970 level', i.e. that populations have been reduced by over 50%. Moreover, the report documents the now-familiar pattern of declines among all the nine 'Red-listed' species included in the indicator: long-term population trends (1970–2004) range from -39% for Reed Bunting to -94% for Tree Sparrow, notwithstanding shorter-term increases for both of these species.

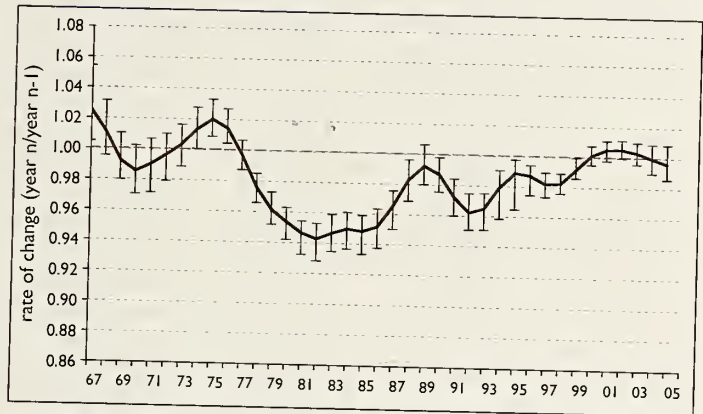


Fig. 1. The Public Service Agreement farmland bird indicator for England.

- that the target date for achievement was not until 2020 – a feather in the cap for the Government (or at least their target-setters!);
- (more seriously) the parlous state of farmland bird populations as chronicled elsewhere in the report and noted above.

Surely, therefore, it is time for the conservation community to press for more realistic targets to be set, e.g. by setting minimum thresholds of population recovery – say 75% of 1970 levels, particularly for Red-listed species – or by weighting the scores of the populations of Red-listed species. In the absence of such changes, the existing targets will at best be of limited relevance or at worst be vulnerable to pressure for their abolition on the grounds of their already having been achieved.

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This situation is somewhat surprising given:

**Bob Coursey**  
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I am sure that many conservationists would agree with Bob Coursey's sentiments about the depleted state of farmland birds. The RSPB is among them and we would wish to see tougher targets for the recovery of their populations. We remain very concerned about the parlous state of some of our farmland birds, especially those that continue to decline. We should not, however, forget that a Government-owned bio-

diversity target of this kind is unprecedented and it has helped to catalyse a huge amount of effort by many players to assist farmland birds, especially through agri-environment scheme prescriptions. So establishing any target at all was a huge success for bird conservation. Even this relatively 'easy' target has not been met and the latest assessment shows that farmland birds collectively may be declining again (fig. 1). Of



course, halting the decline is just the starting point and RSPB would push hard for a new target, if this one was indeed met.

Furthermore, the statistical target (of significant increase) is only one, albeit prominent, part of the Government's Public Service Agreement Delivery Plan. There is recognition here that meeting the statistical target alone may not deliver the spirit of the ambition. To quote from the plan: 'The Government's aim is to bring each species into a stable or increasing position and then to safeguard and sustain that achievement.' So the plan goes deeper than a statistical test (see Gregory *et al.* 2004).

Bob Coursey's call for a more realistic target to be set raises a number of questions and highlights uncertainty in going forwards. Threats to farmland birds may well increase in the short to medium term; for example, set-aside looks likely to be lost in a year or two and climate change may have direct impacts as we experience summer droughts, and indirect impacts through the potential wide-scale introduction of crops for biofuel production. These

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Bob Coursey's letter raises some important points about the Government's Farmland Birds Public Service Agreement (PSA) target.

When the PSA target, 'reversing the long-term decline in the number of farmland birds by 2020', was adopted by the then Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) in 2000, farmland bird populations had been in decline for 25 years. Setting a target to stem and then reverse the decline was seen as challenging for Government, hence the long-term target date.

The PSA target was adopted as a surrogate for the general state of biodiversity in the wider countryside, to complement a separate target on the condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). It was recognised that the target might be met relatively easily if certain species (like Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* and Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*) continued to increase and there was a run of mild winters (which would increase the survival rates of resident species in the indicator). As a consequence, the success criteria for this target (as defined above by Richard Gregory) aim to bring each

changes may be harmful to many farmland birds and to other wildlife too. In this situation, monitoring progress against baseline targets might arguably be more important in the future, because the pressures on wildlife may be set to increase and yet the nature and extent of change is uncertain.

While wholeheartedly supporting the view that we should be bold and ambitious in pressing for the recovery of farmland birds, we should not underestimate the impact that the current targets have had. At a time when Government is reviewing the Public Service Agreement indicators, the RSPB strongly supports keeping, and if necessary revising, the farmland bird indicator target upwards, to safeguard and sustain the recovery of farmland birds and other wildlife.

#### Reference

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species (in the farmland birds indicator) into a stable or increasing position and then consolidate that position. This is in addition to meeting the requirement for the change in the aggregate indicator to be statistically significant and is in line with the overall vision for the target – that wildlife, in general, in the countryside should be in a significantly better state than when the target was adopted.

In addition to this PSA target, the Government has endorsed specific aspirational targets for the nine UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority species that are included in the farmland bird indicator. Defra works as part of the UK BAP partnership to achieve these ambitious recovery targets (see: <http://www.ukbap.org.uk/SpeciesGroup.aspx?ID=7>).

The adoption of the Farmland Birds PSA target has been a major driving force behind significant changes in agriculture policy in England, especially the development of agri-environment schemes, and has greatly influenced the design of Environmental Stewardship, which was launched in 2005.

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# Reviews

## BIRDS OF THE ATLANTIC ISLANDS

By Tony Clarke. Illustrated by Chris Orgill and Tony Disley. Christopher Helm, A&C Black, London, 2006.

368 pages; 69 colour plates, black-and-white photos; maps. ISBN 978-0-7136-6023-4. Paperback, £29.99.

The Macronesian islands – the Azores, Madeira, Canaries and Cape Verdes – are justly popular with travelling birders, as they offer not only an exciting range of endemics and seabirds but also the very real possibility of finding vagrants, perhaps especially those from North America. This latest addition to the Helm Field Guides series will thus be widely welcomed, particularly as it is authored by Tony Clarke, an ornithologist with considerable first-hand knowledge of the Macronesian region and its birds.

Following the usual preliminaries, an introduction discusses the four archipelagos under six subheadings: geography, climate, habitats, ornithological history, birdwatching areas, and a guide to using the book. These essays are both interesting and informative,

though the habitats section would have benefited from greater detail and a wider selection of photos (there are just a miserly six, all unfortunately in black and white rather than colour).

The colour identification plates are arranged in a block between the Introduction and Species Accounts, and are the work of two artists. Unfortunately, given that such plates are a key feature of any field guide, they are mostly disappointing. Colours often appear unnatural, while many plates are simply too crowded. The raptors, in particular, have suffered from the latter problem, to the extent that I found three of the six plates covering this critical group so tightly packed as to be rather confusing. While poor colour reproduction and the overcrowded nature of some of the plates cannot be blamed on the artists, it has to be said that many of the images themselves are unconvincing. For example, the illustrations of the petrels, shearwaters and storm-petrels (Procellariidae/Hydrobatidae), as well as those of vagrant landbirds such as Yellow Warbler *Dendroica petechia*, suffer in comparison with the artwork in the *Collins Bird Guide* (Svensson *et al.* 1999), a book that, incidentally, includes the Canary Islands and

Madeira in its geographical coverage. Visitors to Macronesia would be well advised to take at least Svensson *et al.* and a North American field guide for alternative images.

In contrast to the plates, the individual species accounts, given the limitations of space imposed by the field-guide format, are more consistently helpful for identification. The accounts also usefully summarise, where appropriate, data on breeding and habitat preferences, as well as records of individual vagrants. Although no range maps are included (given the nature of the area covered, these might anyway be difficult to design), distribution and status is outlined both within each species text and in an appendix.

Overall, I felt that this book succeeded in most of its stated aims, in particular realising the author's intention 'to give visiting birdwatchers a better idea of the various species within each archipelago'. Hopefully, an expanded second edition (perhaps in the form of a mini handbook rather than a field guide), with revised and less crowded plates, will eventually follow.

Pete Combridge

## ORCHIDS OF EUROPE, NORTH AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

By Pierre Delforge. A&C Black, London.

640 pages, 1,270 colour photos plus line-drawings. ISBN 978-0-7136-7525-2. Hardback, £29.99.

This book is actually an English translation of the third, revised and expanded, edition of a French work published initially in 1994. Its pages are brimming with information and photographs and cover

520 species of orchid found in the region. An introductory section of nearly 30 pages covers orchid anatomy, ecology, reproduction, classification and nomenclature, identification, hybridisation and orchid conservation. There is also a useful glossary. The meat of the book is the systematic list, heavily populated with superb photographs and providing helpful keys where appropriate. Species accounts include a description, photographs, information on flowering season, habitat and distribution, all to a very high standard. My only slight criticism is that distribution maps would

perhaps have been better than the existing lists of abbreviated countries when trying to identify a member of a complex genus like *Ophrys*. There have been several superb publications on British orchids in recent years but if you are a dedicated botanist, or just one of the many birders with an interest in orchids, this book will prove indispensable when travelling elsewhere in Europe or just outside its boundaries. I thoroughly recommend it.

Paul Harvey



# News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

## Malta bird reserve targeted in hunting row

As BirdLife Malta continues to demand EU action to halt spring hunting on the Mediterranean island, the pro-hunting lobby appears to have taken direct action against BirdLife. Drums of engine oil were emptied into ditches around the Ghadira reserve (one of only two bird reserves in Malta) in late March and bottles of oil were thrown over the boundary fence into the reserve's ponds.

BirdLife Malta said that there

was obviously a serious level of forethought and planning involved, with oil being poured into strategic locations where it would cause the most damage to the fragile ecosystem. The Ghadira Nature Reserve is designated as a Ramsar wetland. It is also a Special Protection Area and a Special Area for Conservation, making it a Natura 2000 site under EU legislation.

Tolga Temuge, BirdLife Malta Executive Director, called on the

Maltese Government to increase security measures around the Ghadira and Is-Simar nature reserves. 'In view of the recent vandalism close to the prehistoric Qrendi temples and keeping in mind the statements posted on the Federation for Hunting's website in January promoting violence and vandalism, the culprits of the recent attack on the Ghadira Nature Reserve are not hard to determine,' he said.

## European conservationists unite to condemn Malta

The Maltese Government's unilateral decision to allow spring hunting from 10th April to 20th May was attacked by a coalition of European bird-protection societies. The European Partnership of BirdLife International – consisting of 42 separate national conservation organisations – has urged the Maltese Prime Minister, Dr Lawrence Gonzi, to end spring hunting and 'clamp down' on poaching.

The conservation groups argue that, since joining the EU in 2004, Malta has breached the European

Birds Directive in four successive years by allowing spring hunting of Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* and Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*. Legal action by the European Commission against Malta began in June 2006, and a European Court case is expected to start later this year. On 15th March 2007, the European Parliament adopted a strong resolution calling on Malta to end spring hunting and trapping of birds immediately. Speaking on behalf of the BirdLife European Partnership, Konstantin Kreiser, EU Policy Manager at BirdLife

International in Brussels, said: 'Conservationists, citizens, organisations and governments across Europe have invested significant amounts of time and resources in protecting wild birds in their own countries. The fact that the Maltese Government allows these birds to be killed during their journey to the breeding grounds is deeply shocking – particularly as this decision ignores the law and all scientific evidence and instead seems heavily influenced by upcoming elections.'

## BOU pins bird flu on poultry trade, not migrant birds

A comprehensive critical review of recent scientific literature on the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N<sub>1</sub>, published in the BOU journal *Ibis* (Vol. 149 (2): 201–214, April 2007), concludes that poultry trade, rather than bird migration, is the main mechanism of global dispersal of the virus.

The review finds that migratory birds have been widely and repeatedly blamed for outbreaks that have subsequently been found to originate in the movement of live poultry and products such as poultry meat. The authors, French

ecologists Michel Gauthier-Clerc, Camille Lebarbenchon and Fredéric Thomas, warn that a misdirected emphasis on contacts between wild birds and outdoor poultry may lead to a reversion to intensive indoor poultry rearing, which actually increases the risk of outbreaks.

Wild birds constitute a permanent source of gene fragments of low pathogenic avian influenza, which are sometimes transmitted to domestic birds. But this report says that how the virus subtypes subsequently evolve depends on

poultry-rearing practices: 'When bird densities are low, a very virulent subtype leading to high host mortality may disappear because of the impossibility of transmitting quickly to healthy birds before the death of sick ones. In Asia, densities of domestic birds are especially high. These ecological conditions favour the preservation and the fast transmission of very virulent strains.'

The progenitor HPAI H5N<sub>1</sub> was discovered in 1996 in domestic geese in the province of Guangdong, southern China, and would

have been dispersed through movements of geese and other poultry. The report explains: 'This would have allowed the virus to extend, thanks to trade, over a vast zone without being discovered. The major epizootic [an epidemic in non-human species] ... started between December 2003 and January 2004 in chickens, which are more susceptible than domestic ducks, with episodes being reported almost simultaneously in eight countries in southeast Asia... The geographical extension and the genetic evolution of the virus since 1996 had probably taken place without any link with wild birds.'

At the beginning of 2005, the virus was still confined to southeast Asia. Cases were reported from Indonesia to China, including Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam. The only wild birds found infected were victims of the virus circulating in domestic birds, such as sparrows, magpies, herons and raptors which scavenge around poultry farms. 'Migratory birds do not recognise borders, yet the virus remained restricted to China and southeast Asia for some years,' the authors point out.

Then, in spring 2005, wild birds were found dead from the virus at Lake Qinghaihu in the centre of China. The dead birds included Bar-headed Geese *Anser indicus*, which winter in India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan from October, and depart northwards at the end of March. 'If Bar-headed Geese brought the virus to Lake Qinghaihu during their spring migration,' say the authors, 'it is necessary to postulate that they contracted the virus during 2004 in China, and would thus have been likely to contaminate India during the autumn or winter of 2004/05. It thus seems far more likely that these migratory birds were the victims of the H5N1 by arriving in spring 2005 on breeding areas which were already infected by the virus.' A year later, in May 2006, it was revealed that Bar-headed Geese

were artificially reared near the lake, raising the possibility that farmed birds were the source of the outbreak.

If migratory wildfowl were a key agent of the dispersal of H5N1, the spring migrations in 2004 and 2005 should have carried it to Siberia, where it would have infected breeding birds that winter in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Middle East, East Africa, Australia and New Zealand. 'A new wave of contamination, on a wide front from Europe to Central Asia, would then have begun in spring 2006,' explain the authors.

Instead, the virus began its westward expansion across East Asia from Novosibirsk in July 2005, a month when waterfowl are moulting and flightless. The spread followed major trading routes such as the trans-Siberian railway, with the largest and most widespread outbreaks in countries with unreliable border controls and poorly developed biosecurity and veterinary services. By January 2006, no case had been reported in the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, Africa, America or Australia, even though the southward migration had ended and many species were preparing to go north to their breeding grounds.

In early 2006, a series of outbreaks in wild birds made their way westwards and northwards across Europe. The birds were mostly waterfowl, particularly swans *Cygnus*, which had been pushed westwards by a spell of extreme cold weather in eastern Europe, and the spread did not correspond to the usual routes or timing of migration. Migratory ducks and waders travel several hundred kilometres in a single day, so if they were the main vectors, the virus should also spread by large jumps of hundreds or thousands of kilometres. The authors explain that 'The observed expansion has rather been by a progressive expansion from isolated outbreaks, the geographical pattern of which corresponds well with major routes and

patterns of human commerce.'

Moreover, if migratory birds were a main agent of dispersal, then after July 2005 we might have expected massive die-offs of wild birds in the breeding areas and along migration routes, since bird populations would have been encountering the virus for the first time. 'However, only sporadic cases were observed. The cases in western Europe after the cold spell on the Black Sea showed that the virus can spread through infected wild birds travelling short distances, but no evidence for long-distance transmission during seasonal migration has yet been found.'

By May 2006, an international conference in Rome had recognised that the virus was spread mainly through the poultry trade, both legal and illegal. But the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) media releases (and most recently the initial response of UK government agencies to the outbreak at a Bernard Matthews factory farm in Suffolk, England, linked by road transport to a subsidiary operation close to an outbreak in Hungary) have continued to focus on the role of migratory birds. 'Given that a key part of the remit of the FAO is to develop international agricultural trade, reluctance to accept that this trade is the main agent of global dispersal of HPAI H5N1 is perhaps unsurprising,' say the authors.

Paradoxically, the authors of this report conclude that 'fear of transmission by wild birds could lead to a reversion to battery farming, which increases risk of outbreaks, rather than maintaining the current trend to better animal welfare resulting from free-range agriculture. All the evidence suggests that maintaining these trends whilst controlling disease through strong veterinary scrutiny and control of trade is more likely to be a successful strategy.'



## Good Godwit! 10,000-km non-stop flight

The avian endurance record books have been rewritten. A Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica baueri* embarking on its northward migration to Alaska this spring has flown 10,200 km in nine days of continuous flight! The satellite-tracked wader has set a new record for long-distance non-stop flight. A team from the Pacific Shorebird Migration Project has reported that it flew from North Island, New Zealand, to Yalu Jiang, at the northern end of the Yellow Sea in

China without stopping.

Previous research had revealed the species' long journey southward, aided by favourable winds, from Alaska to New Zealand and Australia. The new findings show the godwits' capability in flying northward, without the benefit of tailwind.

The coastal wetlands of China's Yellow Sea, where the satellite-tracked godwit landed, are under threat: large areas of coastline continue to be reclaimed for agricul-

ture, industry, urban expansion and other development – an estimated 37% of intertidal areas have been lost since 1950. The Sea is vitally important to threatened waterbirds. To date, BirdLife has listed 16 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in the region, specifically to cover the most important breeding, passage and wintering sites.

Pacific Shorebird Migration Project  
[www.werc.usgs.gov/sattrack/shorebirds/overall.html](http://www.werc.usgs.gov/sattrack/shorebirds/overall.html)

## Residents put a Lydd on airport expansion

'Airport expansion in Kent threatens RSPB reserve...' Does that sound familiar? Well, three years after the RSPB saw off plans for a new airport at Cliffe, on the Medway estuary, the aviation industry came back for a second attempt.

This time the proposal was to build a second runway and new passenger terminal at the tiny Lydd airport, with a 400x increase in passenger numbers, from 5,000 to two million per annum! But local residents, voting in two town council referenda in April, heavily defeated the plan (the proposal was rejected by 66% of the 3,350 people who cast a vote).

The airport lies next to the RSPB's Dungeness reserve, its oldest reserve and one of the country's most unusual, and one which boasts the highest level of protection under UK and European law. In summer, the reserve has 60 breeding bird species and in winter up to 120,000 birds use the reserve every day.

Chris Corrigan, RSPB Regional Director, said: 'Once again, local people have clearly demonstrated their opposition to the airport's ludicrous proposals. The airport should recognise that their expansion plans are neither needed nor wanted in Lydd and withdraw their plans now. The expansion plans would spell disaster for the area. Jets taking off and landing throughout the day would put the fragile wildlife at risk, destroy the quality of life for local people and put existing livelihoods, many based around local tourism, in jeopardy.'

## County Recorder changes

Steve Lister has taken over from Rob Fray as Recorder for Leicestershire & Rutland. Steve's contact details are 6 Albert Promenade, Loughborough, Leicestershire LE11 1RE; e-mail [stevelister@surfbirder.com](mailto:stevelister@surfbirder.com); tel. 01509 829495.

Mark Hawkes, Recorder for Cambridgeshire, has moved. His new contact details are 7 Cook Drive, Eynesbury, St Neots, Cambridgeshire PE19 2JU; tel. 01480 215305.

## Councillors reject Ruddy cheek of Defra

The ongoing cull of Ruddy Ducks *Oxyura jamaicensis* in the UK to protect White-headed Ducks *O. leucocephala* in Spain has run into some healthy Lancastrian scepticism. Councillors in Wigan have urged the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to reconsider its plans for a cull in Greater Manchester as they are unconvinced that such a sledgehammer is required to crack the small nut of Ruddy Duck immigration to Spain.

The motion was: 'This Council requests Defra to reconsider its decisions permitting the culling of the Ruddy Duck population in Wigan and elsewhere in Britain that could adversely affect the Wigan Ruddy Duck population, and calls for the implementation and completion of a proper examination of the validity of the claimed reasons for the cull and an investigation of all the up-to-date scientific information including the research and observations of internationally renowned bird expert Tom Gullick, the County Bird Recorder for Greater Manchester, Judith Smith, the Leigh Ornithological Society, the RSPCA, Animal Aid and other wildlife organisations.'

Expert briefing by Judith Smith *et al.* (that only four Ruddy Ducks reached Spain in 2006, compared with seven in 2005; that two hybrids were also shot in 2006, compared with none in 2005; and that the Spanish believe they shoot all the Ruddies that do reach Spain anyway) raised the legitimate question: Why should a multi-million-pound cull be taking place in the UK at all?

## Birding Mongolia

On the far side of the great steppes that stretch eastward into Asia from Hungary is the intriguing country of Mongolia. Resident birder Axel Braunlich has recently launched a website and weblog called Birding Mongolia <http://birdsmongolia.blogspot.com/>, which is worth a visit. His 350th bird seen in Mongolia was the country's first Desert Finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta*.

## British Birds on Radio Four

A special edition of the Radio Four *Nature* programme to be broadcast on Monday 7th May celebrates 100 years of *BB*.

Producer Brett Westwood has interviewed a number of prominent birders including James Ferguson-Lees, D. I. M. Wallace, Mark Cocker and Stephen Moss – and *BB* editor Roger Riddington – for the half-hour programme, which examines *BB*'s contribution to British ornithology over the past century.

Listeners can tune in on 92–95 FM and 198 LW – or on the Radio Four website at [www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/science/nature.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/science/nature.shtml)

The programme is transmitted at 9 pm on 7th May – but, in case you do miss it, the programme is archived and you can hear it online at the above web address.

## BTO Little Ringed and Ringed Plover Breeding Survey

This spring, the BTO will be undertaking a survey of breeding Ringed *Charadrius hiaticula* and Little Ringed Plovers *C. dubius*. The survey aims to establish the current status of these two species and determine how they have fared since the last full surveys back in 1984. It will take place between 15th April and 15th July. For further information on how to take part visit [www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org)

## The Eric Hosking Trust

The Eric Hosking Trust is looking for applications for its 2007 bursaries. The aim of the Trust is to sponsor ornithological research through the media of writing, photography, painting or illustration. Bursaries of up to £500 are awarded once a year, and the closing date for applications is 30th September 2007.

Details are available from The Eric Hosking Trust, Pages Green House, Wetheringsett, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 5QA; tel. (01728) 861113; e-mail [david@hosking-tours.co.uk](mailto:david@hosking-tours.co.uk)

## Birdfair update

A reminder that the 2007 British Birdwatching Fair, on the weekend of 17th–19th August, will be supporting BirdLife International, with the theme 'Preventing Extinctions: Saving the world's Critically Endangered birds'. The 2007 Birdfair Celebrity Lecture will be given by Simon King on the evening of Saturday 18th August. One of the most popular attractions at every fair is the art marquee, where a wide range of artists (including a number of those mentioned in Alan Harris's article on pp. 266–279, and others familiar to *BB* readers, including John Cox, Robert Gillmor, Szabolcs Kokay, Richard Lewington, Michael Warren and Colin Woolf) will be exhibiting. A full list can be found via the Birdfair website, [www.birdfair.org.uk](http://www.birdfair.org.uk)

# Rarities Committee news

## New chairman for BBRC

On 1st April 2008, Colin Bradshaw will retire as chairman of BBRC after a total of 19 years on the committee, including 11 as chairman. We are seeking nominations for a new appointment to this administrative position. The successful candidate will be involved in setting the direction of BBRC and overseeing the committee's development during the next decade, as well as ensuring that it runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. The appointee, subject to successful completion of a 12-month probationary period, will be offered a three-year appointment, which can be extended to a

maximum of ten years in total.

The new chair will be appointed by a panel consisting of BBRC members and *BB* directors. There are several essential criteria for the post:

- experience of working on BBRC, preferably with some knowledge of electronic circulation and voting procedures;
- up-to-date expertise in bird identification and record assessment (even though the chair will be a non-voting position);
- an ability to think and act in a strategic capacity;
- experience of chairing an organisation;

- excellent organisational and communication skills;
- familiarity with IT in terms of both its daily usage and its potential for development.

Anyone interested in the post should contact Richard Porter (e-mail [richardporter@diastart.net](mailto:richardporter@diastart.net), tel. 01263 740322) for informal discussions. The closing date for applications will be 15th June and an appointment will be made by mid August.



The British Birds Rarities Committee is sponsored by Carl Zeiss Ltd.



# Recent reports

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Eric Dempsey

Hugh Harrop



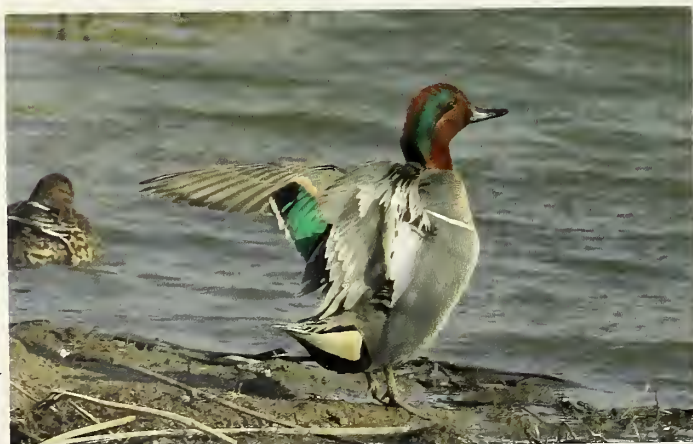
137. White-morph Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens*, with Greylag Geese *A. anser*, East Burrafirth, Shetland, April 2007.

Richard Brooks



138. Red-breasted Geese *Branta ruficollis*, with 'Dark-bellied' Brent Geese *B. bernicla bernicla*, Wells-next-the-Sea, Norfolk, March 2007.

Mike Ashforth



139. Male Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis*, Marshside, Lancashire & North Merseyside, March 2007.

This summary of unchecked reports covers early March to early April 2007.

**Red-breasted Goose** *Branta ruficollis* Two, Warham Greens, 10th March, same Wells-next-the-Sea 11th–21st March, then Lynn Point 25th–27th March and Snettisham 30th March to 2nd April (all Norfolk), presumably the same as in Lincolnshire earlier in the year. **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* Harrow Lodge Park (London), 7th–10th April; Dagenham Chase (London), 7th–8th April. **Lesser Scaup** *Aythya affinis* Blagdon Lake, 11th–20th March, presumed same Cheddar Reservoir 24th–31st March and Burtle 2nd–8th April (all Somerset); Lough Bunn and other sites (Co. Cavan), 16th–23rd March; Edinburgh (Lothian), 30th March to 10th April; Benbecula (Western Isles), two long-stayers throughout. **Black Scoter** *Melanitta americana* Llanfairfechan (Caernarfonshire), long-stayer to 9th April. **Barrow's Goldeneye** *Bucephala islandica* Quoile Pondage (Co. Down), long-stayer seen again 6th–10th April; Callander/Loch Venacher (Forth), long-stayer to 10th April.

**Pacific Diver** *Gavia pacifica* Llys-y-Fran Reservoir (Pembrokeshire), long-stayer to 20th March. **White-billed Diver** *Gavia adamsii* Hayle, long-stayer to 20th March,

same Sennen Cove (both Cornwall), 22nd March; Whalsay (Shetland), 16th–26th March; Laxo (Shetland), 17th March and 6th–9th April; Lewis (Western Isles), 22nd–30th March; Sound of Arisaig (Highland), 22nd March.

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* East Prawle (Devon), 11th March; St Mary's (Scilly), 11th March to 6th April; St Agnes (Scilly), 14th–15th March. Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* Holland Haven (Essex), 2nd April; Otterton/Otter Estuary area (Devon), long-stayer to 9th April. Great White Egret *Ardea alba* Loch of Banks (Orkney), 28th March to 1st April; Lytchett Bay (Dorset), 4th April; Saltholme Pool (Cleveland), 6th April; Woolstone Eyes (Cheshire & Wirral), 7th April. Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* Lytham St Anne's/Warton Marsh (Lancashire & North Merseyside), long-stayer to 10th April.

'Black-eared Kite' *Milvus migrans lineatus* Wolferton/Snettisham areas (Norfolk), long-stayer to 10th April. White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* Heswall (Cheshire & Wirral), then Crosby Marine Park (Lancashire & North Merseyside), 6th April. Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus* Pentire Point and Stepper Point (Cornwall), long-stayer to 21st March.

Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus* West Burra (Shetland), 6th April. Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* Alaw Estuary/



Kit Day

140. Male Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*, Harrow Lodge Park, London, April 2007.



Paul Bowyer

141. Male Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*, Cheddar Reservoir, Somerset, March 2007.



Hugh Harrop

142. Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*, Banna Minn, Burra, Shetland, April 2007.





Kit Day

**143.** Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*, with Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa*, Mistley Walls, Essex/Suffolk, March 2007.

Inland Sea (Anglesey), long-stayer to 1st April; Mistley Walls (Essex/Suffolk), long-stayer to 9th April; Oare Marshes (Kent), long-stayer to 10th April; Dundalk (Co. Louth), long-stayer to at least 5th April. Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* Freiston Shore (Lincolnshire), 9th April. Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia* Hayle Estuary (Cornwall), long-stayer to 10th April. Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla* Countess Weir and other localities in the Exeter area (Devon), long-stayer to 10th April. Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan* Crowdy Reservoir, 1st–4th April, presumably same Camel Estuary (both Cornwall), 9th April. Bonaparte's Gull *Larus philadelphia* Middleton (Co. Cork), 20th March; Brandon Marsh (Warwickshire), 27th March; Lewis, 8th April.

Brünnich's Guillemot *Uria lomvia* Scousburgh (Shetland), found dead, 25th March. Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus* Lewis, two, long-stayers to 27th March; also North Uist, 4th–5th April; and St Kilda (all Western Isles), 5th April perhaps one of same.

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* Brogborough Lake (Bedfordshire), 30th March to 1st April. Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus* Easington (East Yorkshire), 31st March, found dead later that day; Out Skerries (Shetland), 2nd–3rd April. 'Black-throated Thrush' *Turdus ruficollis atrogularis* Buckton (East Yorkshire), 25th–27th March; Walcot

Mill (Shropshire), 8th April; Bute (Argyll), long-stayer to 23rd March.

Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus* Wouldham (Kent), 8th–9th April. Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* Newquay (Cornwall), long-stayer to 9th April. Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* Rainham Marshes (London/Essex), long-stayer to 26th March. European Serin *Serinus serinus* Heacham (Norfolk), 2nd–4th April;

Hengistbury Head (Dorset), 4th–5th April; Stanpit Marsh (Dorset), 6th April; North Shields (Northumberland), 7th April; Dawlish Warren (Devon), 8th April. Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* Marazion (Cornwall), 26th March; Hengistbury Head, 8th April; Amwell Gravel-pits (Hertfordshire), long-stayer to 9th April.



**144.** Common Crane *Grus grus*, Cropredy, Oxfordshire, March 2007.



# Guidelines for contributors

*British Birds* publishes material dealing with original observations on the birds of the Western Palearctic. Except for records of rarities, papers and notes are normally accepted for publication only on condition that the material is not being offered in whole or in part to any other journal or magazine. Photographs and drawings are welcomed. Referees are used where appropriate, and all submissions are reviewed by the BB Editorial Board or Notes Panel.

Papers should be concise and factual, taking full account of previous literature and avoiding repetition as much as possible. Opinions should be based on adequate evidence. Authors are encouraged to submit their work to other ornithologists for critical assessment and comment prior to submission. Such help received should be acknowledged in a separate section. For main papers, an abstract summarising the key results and conclusions should be included, but should not exceed 5% of the total length. Authors should carefully consult this issue for style of presentation, especially of references and tables.

English and scientific names and sequence of birds should follow The 'British Birds' List of Birds of the Western Palearctic (1997), with amendments as detailed in *Brit. Birds* 97: 2-5 and listed on the BB website at: [www.britishtobirds.co.uk/bblst.htm](http://www.britishtobirds.co.uk/bblst.htm) or, for non-West Palearctic species, Dickinson (2003), *The Howard and Moore Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World*. Names of plants should follow Stace (1999), *Field Flora of the British Isles*. Names of mammals should follow Corbet & Harris (1991), *The Handbook of British Mammals*, 3rd edition. Topographical (plumage and structure) and ageing terminology should follow editorial recommendations (*Brit. Birds* 74: 239-242; 78: 419-427; 80: 502).

Contributions should be submitted on disk or (preferably) by e-mail, to the Editor. Most word-processing applications are suitable, but, if you are not using an up-to-date, standard program, it is best to submit two versions, one in the original word-processed format and one in a basic text format such as RTF (Rich Text Format). For contributors without access to a computer, text should be submitted in

duplicate, typewritten, with double spacing and wide margins, and on one side of the paper only.

Hand-drawn figures should be in black ink on good-quality tracing paper or white drawing paper; lettering should be inserted lightly in pencil, while captions should be typed separately. Please discuss computer-generated maps and figures with the Editor before submitting them.

For use in main papers, notes and letters, photographs can be submitted as 35 mm transparencies, high-quality prints or digital images. Digital images should be submitted as TIFF files in either PC or Mac format with a resolution of 300 dpi and the image sized at 15 cm wide. TIFF files should be supplied on a CD-rom. Digital images with a comparable resolution in other formats (e.g. JPEGs), must be saved as high/maximum quality files. Lower resolution images or video-grabs will be used more sparingly, and usually only when there is no alternative (for example, in 'Recent reports'). All digital images must be submitted in their original state with no manipulation (e.g. adjustment of colours, curves, etc.). Digital images can be emailed **ONLY** if they do not exceed 1 MB in size.

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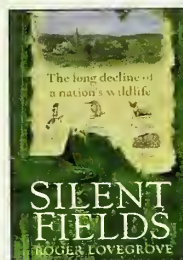


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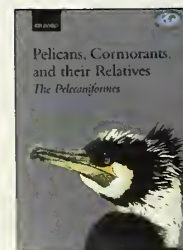


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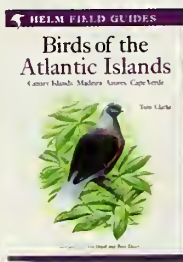
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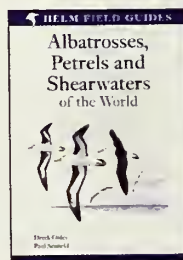
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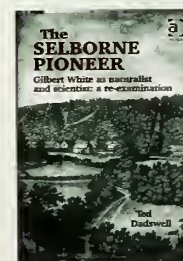
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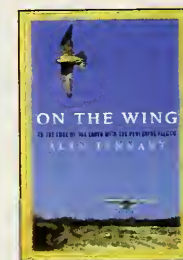
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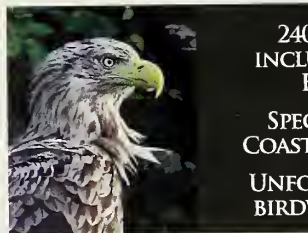
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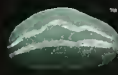
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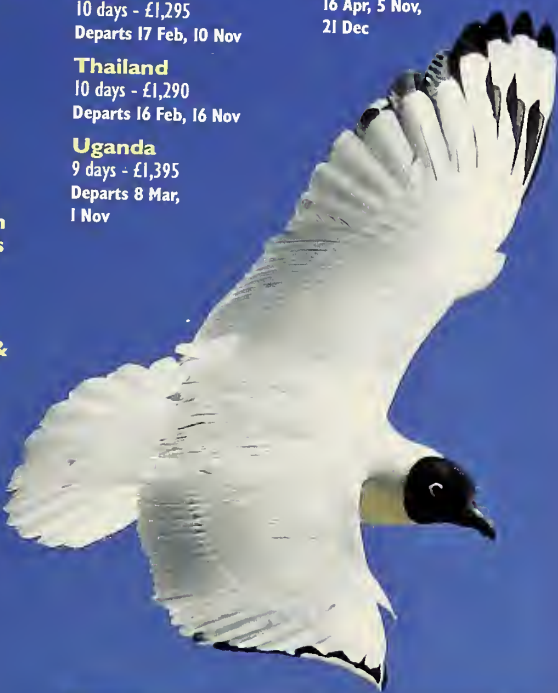
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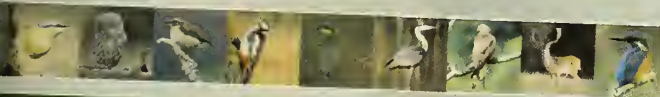
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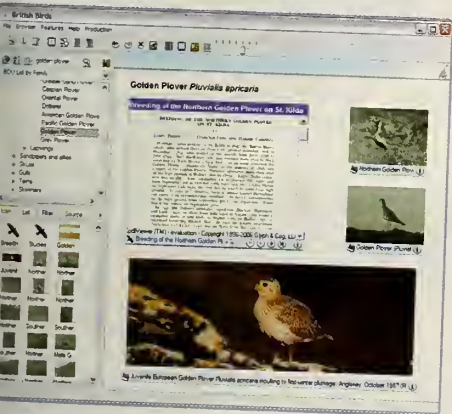
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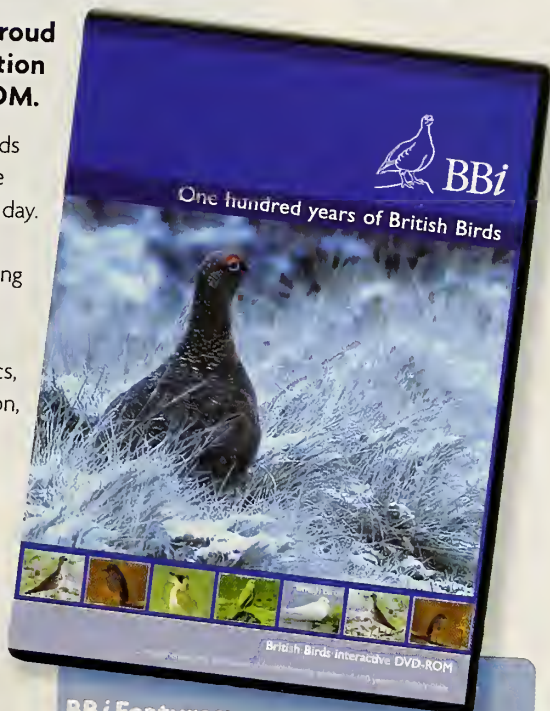
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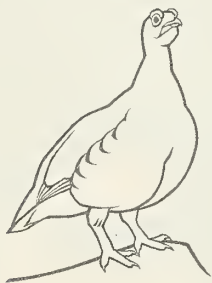
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1907–2007 Centenary Issue





One hundred years! Even the simple act of typing those three words on the keyboard stimulates an urge to swivel round in my chair and begin browsing through some of the 99 volumes lining the shelf behind me. However, I did not intend this editorial to be about looking back. Already we have published a number of papers reviewing various elements of the past 100 years, all of which seem to have been well received; and there are more waiting to be published.

It is encouraging to be able to present the latest Rare Breeding Birds Report in this issue, a two-year report covering 2003 and 2004, with the promise of 2005 to follow in about six months or so from now. The RBBP report, along with the annual BBRC report, is a cornerstone of *BB*'s role as the journal of record, so it is fitting that a significant chunk of this extra-large birthday issue is devoted to the UK's rare breeding birds. Reports as comprehensive as this are inevitably time-consuming to produce, and a change in compiler often leads to delays, which can be oh so hard to recover. It is a pleasure to introduce Mark Holling's first report as RBBP Secretary, hopefully the first of many, just as it is to welcome Nigel Hudson as the new BBRC Secretary, two key appointments right at the start of *BB*'s second century. The other main paper in this issue continues the theme of rare breeding birds; Brian Martin and Judith Smith present a detailed report on the progress of the UK's breeding population of Black-necked Grebes, which nicely complements the RBBP report itself.

What of the next 100 years? I firmly believe that there will be a role for *BB* throughout the next century carrying out its key functions summarised every month inside the front cover. A more immediate question is that of the format of the magazine. It seems almost inevitable that

*BB* will be offered in some format of electronic media at some point and although we have no immediate plans to offer online subscriptions, that situation will be kept under regular review. However, in the past 12 months we have been exploring the benefits of electronic scanning and searching in relation to those previous 99 volumes. This has resulted in the creation of *BBi*, which will be launched later this summer. A single DVD will contain all the editorial content of *BB*, including photos and artwork, and the product will be fully searchable. Suddenly, there is the prospect of something even more compelling than those 99 brown-leather-bound volumes on the back shelf of my office. An instantaneous way to shortlist all photographs of any particular species, or references to any one of the thousands of topics that *BB* has covered down the years will significantly enhance the value of all that stored information. A partnership with BirdGuides has enabled us to take advantage of the latest scanning technologies, the predecessors of which will be familiar to many via *BWPI*. Everyone associated with *BB* felt that this was a worthwhile project with which to celebrate our centenary year, and it is great news that, at the time of writing, we are on schedule for it to be launched at this year's British Birdwatching Fair. Of course, the DVD will not be complete, in that it will contain only 99 years, but the final volume will be available as a free download from the internet for anyone who buys the disc. *BB* subscribers and regular contributors will qualify for a substantial discount on the full price of the DVD (see p. 386 for details, while more information about the product itself can be found in the advertising pages of this issue; see also [www.birdguides.com/bbi](http://www.birdguides.com/bbi)).

I felt that I should end this editorial in the same way that Harry Witherby opened the editorial on page 1, issue 1, Volume 1, in June 1907, which is by acknowledging all those who have helped and supported *BB*. Contributors, supporters, subscribers, members of the *BB* Editorial Board and Notes Panel, members of BBRC and RBBP, directors, trustees and, last but not least, the full-time and part-time staff who work for *BB* – thanks to you all; let's make the next 100 years even better than the first.

*Roger Riddington*

# Rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom in 2003 and 2004

*Mark Holling and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel*



A national survey of Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus* was carried out in the UK in 2004. Alan Harris

This, the thirty-first report of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, presents details of the status of the rarest breeding birds in the UK for both 2003 and 2004. Two years are included here in order to catch up with the delay in processing the Panel's records. Because of the larger volume of records to report, analysis and comment has unfortunately had to be reduced. Future reports will again cover a single breeding season, in more depth, and the synopsis for 2005 will be published early in 2008.

## *The Panel*

The current membership of the Panel (June 2007) is Humphrey Crick, Ian Francis, David

Norman, Judith Smith, Ken Smith, David Stroud and Mark Holling (Secretary). David Norman joined the Panel in 2005. The individual members of the Panel serve in a personal capacity, but three of them are also able to reflect the interests and requirements of the respective sponsoring bodies and one of them those of the Association of County Recorders and Editors. The work of the Panel is supported financially by JNCC (on behalf of the country conservation agencies) and the RSPB, with additional support coming from the BTO.

This is the first report to be produced by Mark Holling, who replaced Malcolm Ogilvie as Secretary in May 2006. Malcolm served as Secretary from 1993 until 2006, thus becoming



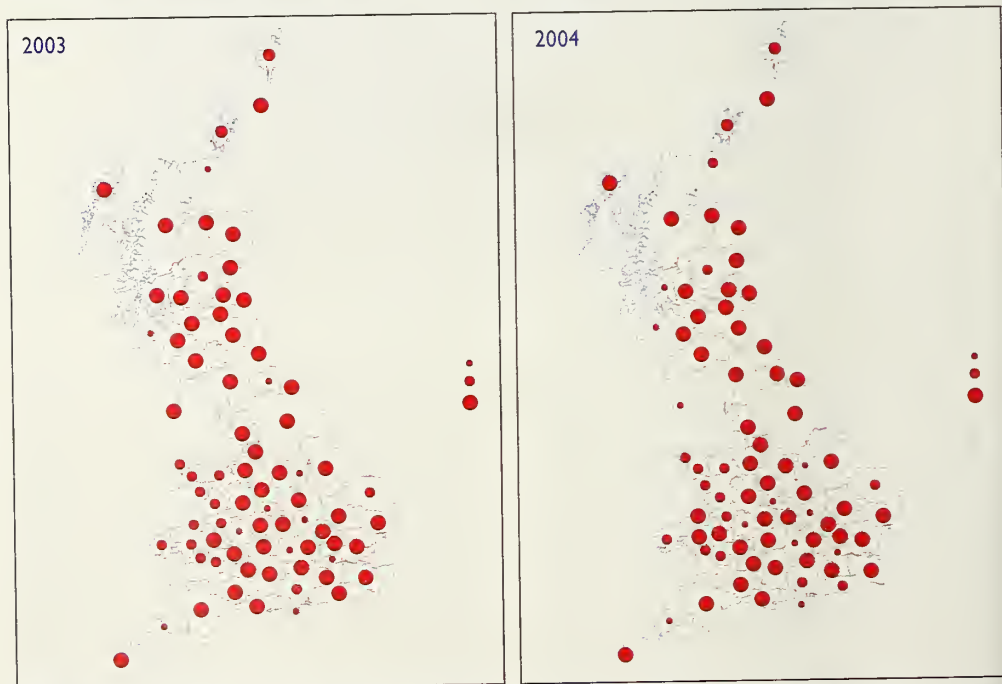
the Panel's longest-serving Secretary. During this period the volume of material submitted increased enormously and, as well as carrying out his normal duties, Malcolm developed comprehensive database systems which are still being used today. The Panel would like to take this opportunity of thanking Malcolm for his efforts during his 13 years as the public face of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel and we hope that he enjoys many more years on his beloved Islay.

In addition, we wish to pay a further tribute to Colin Bibby, who died in August 2004, just as the last RBBP report was being finalised for publication. Colin's achievements for ornithology and conservation have been well reported in many obituaries (see, for example, *Brit. Birds* 98: 220–221), but his pivotal role in the development of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel has been less well documented. Colin championed the great potential for the Panel to provide vital data for bird conservation. It was Colin who pushed what was, at the time, a somewhat reluctant Panel to move to computerise the RBBP data, then a sensitive issue. These facilities are now taken for granted and it is difficult to conceive using any other system.

The Panel will miss Colin's outstanding input, particularly his vision, but most of all we shall miss him as a friend and someone who always managed to turn serious work into good fun.

### Coverage

The Panel collects records from the whole of the UK, including the Isle of Man and Northern Ireland, but not from the Channel Islands or the Republic of Ireland. Most of the information presented in this report is submitted by county and regional bird recorders and the Panel is extremely grateful for their support. Coverage for the years reported here was good, with some data received from most counties. The most notable exceptions were Cornwall and Nottinghamshire (both years), and Argyll for 2004. In part, this was due to a delay in data processing of those counties' records and the data will be added to the Panel's archives in due course. There were also limited returns from some counties in Wales. Additional data are received from some specialist groups, from Schedule 1 Licence returns and from RSPB reserves. Maps showing a representation of the coverage in both years are shown in fig. 1.



**Fig. 1.** Data submission to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, 2003 and 2004. This shows the level of detail provided to the Panel, by recording area. Large dots indicate full submission for all species from county/regional recorders, with supplementary data from other sources where applicable; medium-size dots indicate data extracted from local bird reports for all species, with supplementary data from other sources where applicable; small dots indicate limited species coverage – data extracted from Schedule 1 licence returns, local raptor study group reports or RSPB reserve logs only. A blank indicates that no data were submitted. Note that for Northern Ireland, bird report data were made available to the Panel in both years.

### Data inclusion and recording standards

There have been no changes to the acceptance criteria for records since the Panel's last report (Ogilvie *et al.* 2004). It is the Panel's policy to follow the opinions of the appropriate county recorder and local committees, and to publish records that have not been vetted in this way only in exceptional circumstances. In terms of breeding evidence, the Panel follows the recommendations of the European Ornithological Atlas Committee. However, although all records of species on the Panel's list are welcomed and will be archived alongside other information, we will not normally publish records of birds which appear to be passing migrants and which are recorded for a few days only, even if the record is of a singing male.

The Panel is in the process of developing new Recording Standards. These will be widely circulated and we hope that they will provide guidance in the collection of the most useful information and in the submission of records of rare breeding birds. In addition, species-specific guidance is being compiled and will be made available on the Panel's website [www.rbbp.org.uk](http://www.rbbp.org.uk).

In cases where new data for years already reported upon are submitted to the Panel, the archives are updated and annual totals revised and included in these reports. The presentation of species data in this report is similar to that of previous ones although, since this report covers two years, some information has not been repeated and readers are referred to previous reports.

For 2003–04, the list of species considered remained unchanged except for the addition of Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*, now a Schedule 1 species. The list includes all species which have UK populations of less than 300 pairs in a typical year, and all species on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. The full list is available from the Panel's website. This list is kept under regular review and future changes will be announced in BB.

### Conservation uses of Panel data

It is the Panel's policy to make data available for relevant conservation uses, always maintaining appropriate controls to ensure the safety of the birds and their breeding sites. Site-specific information is used by JNCC and the country conservation agencies, and national datasets are used to help to plan surveys – for example, the RSPB survey of breeding Common Scoters *Melanitta nigra* and the national BTO survey of

Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius*, both in 2007. Extensive use of Panel data is made in the annual *State of the UK's Birds* publication.

The Panel is keen to encourage bona fide individuals to use Panel data in compiling reviews of the status and population of rare breeding species. Recent publications have included one on Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola* (Chisholm 2007) and one on Black-necked Grebes *Podiceps nigricollis* (Martin & Smith 2007; pp. 268–278). The Panel maintains a Data Access Policy, to which prospective users of data should refer (see [www.rbbp.org.uk](http://www.rbbp.org.uk)). Currently, Panel data are being used in reviews of breeding Spotted Crakes *Porzana porzana*, parakeets (Psittacidae), Redwings *Turdus iliacus* in Kent and Bramblings *Fringilla montifringilla* in Highland. The Secretary has worked closely with the editors of the new *Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* in press) and the Panel is grateful to the authors for the additional data which have come to light during the compilation of that book.

### Review of the years 2003 and 2004

The year 2003 will be remembered by many for the long hot, dry period in July and August, the UK temperature record being broken in mid August when 38.5°C was recorded in Kent. These warm conditions may have encouraged the nesting attempts by European Serins *Serinus serinus* in Norfolk. Much of this dry weather was after the breeding season for most species, however, and following the dry and warm early spring, there were overnight frosts and some heavy rain in May and June. The rain and floods in early June caused some brood losses at a critical time, Red Kites *Milvus milvus* being among the species affected.

Following another mild winter, allowing high over-winter survival for resident passerines such as Cetti's *Cettia cetti* and Dartford Warblers *Sylvia undata*, May 2004 proved to be warm and sunny, which favoured nesting by many species, but the remainder of the summer was changeable and showery. Without the heavy rainstorms of summer 2003, however, 2004 was the more productive breeding season for many species.

This report includes details of 90 species breeding or showing indications of breeding over the two years 2003 and 2004.

Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis* appears in the Panel's reports for the first time, owing to the record of a male paired with a (presumed) female Eurasian Teal *A. crecca* in Lancashire &



Dan Powell

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

North Merseyside in 2004. Numbers of Pintails *A. acuta* in 2004 reached their lowest level since 1987, with a maximum of just 22 pairs. Garganey *A. querquedula* was recorded breeding in Wiltshire for the first time in 2003, although numbers overall appeared to be higher in 2004, with up to 78 pairs noted compared with 56 in 2003. In 2004, a Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris* paired with a Tufted Duck *A. fuligula* in the Outer Hebrides hatched two young. This is the first confirmed breeding for this species in these reports, albeit by a hybrid pair. A male Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* summered in Cumbria, but there was no hint of a pairing; this was also the case for the male Smew *Mergellus albellus* present in Highland in June 2004. Rather more encouragingly, however, was the pair of Smew in Clyde in 2003, which were seen mating in late May.

The total number of Common Quails *Coturnix coturnix* reported in 2004 was close to the ten-year mean at 407 pairs or singing males, but the 18 confirmed breeding pairs was well above average for this secretive species. For Red-throated Divers *Gavia stellata* in Orkney, a successful season in 2004 was thought to be due to reduced chick predation by Great Skuas *Stercorarius skua*, because many skuas left the islands early after widespread breeding failure among most seabirds. In Shetland, by contrast, 2004 was the poorest season since 1979, with many diver chicks dying of starvation or being pre-

dated. It is always encouraging to report more unusual species, such as the displaying Great Northern Divers *G. immer* in the Outer Hebrides in July 2003, but there was no more to report there after that. For Slavonian Grebes *Podiceps auritus*, the two years provided contrasting productivity figures, with 2004 being poor despite the number of pairs being the highest since 1997. All Slavonian Grebes breed in Scotland, but it is beginning to look as though all the Black-necked Grebes *P. nigricollis* will be in England soon, as former sites in Scotland were found deserted and only one chick fledged there in 2004.

The RSPB/Natural England study of Eurasian Bitterns *Botaurus stellaris* showed that by 2004 the numbers had exceeded the UK Biodiversity Action Plan target of 50 booming males by 2010, when 55–69 boomers were found at 37 sites, including one in Wales. The huge growth in numbers of Little Egrets *Egretta garzetta* continues, with over 350 pairs nesting in 2004 and three counties reporting their first breeding records in 2003–04.

Owing to the success of the Red Kite release programme and the continuing recovery of the Welsh population, the number of pairs of kites is still climbing and the number of young fledged was at least 892 in 2004. There are clear signs of range expansion in southern England, based on the original releases in the Chilterns. This contrasts with the situation in northern

Scotland, however, where the number of breeding pairs remains static. This seems to reflect the loss of young birds as they leave the core area, illegal persecution being the likely cause. This is also a factor in the static or declining populations of both Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus* and Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* in some areas, as shown by the results of national surveys of these raptors during the period under review. In contrast, Marsh Harriers *C. aeruginosus* are faring significantly better. As birds of prey become more widespread, fewer specific details of nesting sites and productivity are received, which is a pity as the Panel's archives are the only place where this information is held for posterity.

Numbers of singing male Corn Crakes *Crex crex* continue to rise, reflecting the success of management schemes in northern Scotland; over 1,000 were recorded in 2004 and the first confirmed breeding record for the reintroduction programme in Cambridgeshire is also notable. Common Crane *Grus grus* is becoming more established as a breeding species as the first young away from the Norfolk population were hatched in 2004 (although sadly these were lost to predators). Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* was added to the list of breeding bird species in Wales in 2003, and two pairs nested there in 2004. Less welcome news is the apparent permanent loss of Dotterels *Charadrius morinellus* as a breeding species in southern Scotland, and the apparent demise of Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii* (only a single bird was recorded in 2003 and none in 2004). Pectoral Sandpipers *C. melanotos* joined the list of UK breeding species, however, with two breeding attempts in 2004, one successful, and possibly a total of four pairs present.

After what had appeared to be a reduction in 2001–02, numbers of Mediterranean Gulls *Larus melanocephalus* increased to a new peak, with up to 241 pairs in 2004. By contrast, Yellow-legged Gull *L. michahellis* remains an apparently reluctant colonist; the only pure pairs of this species were reported in Dorset, although again they failed to produce young in either year.

For Shore Lark *Eremophila alpestris*, a record of successful breeding in 2003 was the first since 1977. Although birds were present at the same site in 2004, breeding could not be proved in that year. This is one of those passerines which are sometimes located in the vastness of the Highland region of Scotland, where encounters

are brief and, frustratingly, often not repeated. Such circumstances also applied to the lone Waxwing *Bombicilla garrulus* and three singing Bluethroats *Luscinia svecica* that were each seen on one day only. Fieldfares *Turdus pilaris* can also fall into that category, although they occur more widely. Singles only were reported in 2003 but there were several records in 2004 which involved confirmed breeding or were strongly indicative of it, in counties from Orkney south to Lincolnshire. Cetti's Warbler, restricted to the southern half of England and to parts of Wales, continues to increase, with over 1,000 singing males in both years and indications that these are underestimates. In contrast, Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris* remains on the brink, with only Kent reporting proved breeding, despite at least 11 birds in Shetland in June 2004, where copulation was recorded.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla* is probably an under-recorded species, but this report includes the highest number of singing males ever recorded: up to 283 in 2004. The first breeding record for Cheshire & Wirral was reported in 2003, but sadly not repeated in 2004. Another species clearly on the rise is Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*, the sample reported to the Panel in 2004 being close to the population estimate for 2002, when a thorough survey was undertaken. The story for Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* though is less welcome. A continuing decline is evident and only 3–8 pairs bred in 2004, at just eight sites, compared to 8–35 at 34 sites ten years earlier.

The first successful breeding for Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* since 1999 was reported from Shetland in 2004. Norfolk produced one, possibly two, breeding pairs of European Serin in 2003, the first for Norfolk and the first nesting in the UK since 1996. Since the split from Lesser Redpoll *Carduelis cabaret*, breeding records of Common Redpolls *C. flammea* have taken on more interest, and 21 pairs were reported to the Panel in 2004, all in Shetland and the Outer Hebrides.

#### Key to geographical regions used in this report

The names of recording areas listed below are normally based on the names used by local recorders who sent the Panel their information. In Wales, the recording areas are based on Watsonian vice-counties, as shown in the *Welsh Bird Report* (e.g. Green *et al.* 2007). In Scotland, the recording areas are based on local bird-report areas and are shown on the SOC website ([www.the-soc.org.uk](http://www.the-soc.org.uk)). Scottish Raptor Study



Group areas are, however, different. As some raptor data are available only by these areas, these names are used where necessary in this report. A map showing the boundaries of these is on the website of the Scottish Raptor Study Groups [www.scottishraptorgroups.org/areas](http://www.scottishraptorgroups.org/areas).

#### England, SW

Avon, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Isles of Scilly, Isle of Wight, Somerset, Wiltshire

#### England, SE

Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, London, Oxfordshire, Surrey, Sussex

#### England, E

Cambridgeshire (including Huntingdon & Peterborough), Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Suffolk

#### England, Central

Derbyshire, Herefordshire, Leicestershire & Rutland, Nottinghamshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Midlands, Worcestershire

#### England, N

Cheshire & Wirral, Cleveland, Cumbria, Co. Durham, Greater Manchester, Isle of Man, Lancashire & North Merseyside, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear, Yorkshire

#### Wales

The Watsonian vice-counties of Anglesey (Môn), Brecon (Brycheiniog), Caernarfon, Carmarthen (Caerfyrddin), Ceredigion, Denbigh (Dinbych), Flint (Fflint), Glamorgan (Morgannwg), Gower, Gwent, Meirionnydd, Mont-

gomery (Trefaldwyn), Pembroke (Penfro), Radnor (Maesyfod)

#### Scotland, S

The local bird-recording areas of Ayrshire, Borders, Clyde, Clyde Islands, Dumfries & Galloway, Lothian

#### Scotland, Mid

The local bird-recording areas of Angus & Dundee, Fife, Isle of May, Moray & Nairn, North-east Scotland, Perth & Kinross, Upper Forth

#### Scotland, N & W

The local bird-recording areas of Argyll, Caithness, Fair Isle, Highland, Orkney, Outer Hebrides, Shetland

#### Northern Ireland

Co. Antrim, Co. Armagh, Co. Down, Co. Fermanagh, Co. Londonderry, Co. Tyrone

#### Terminology

The definitions of 'Confirmed breeding', 'Probable breeding' and 'Possible breeding' used in the Panel's reports follow those recommended by the European Ornithological Atlas Committee. Within tables, the abbreviations 'Confirmed (pairs)' and 'Possible/probable (pairs)' mean, respectively, 'Number of pairs confirmed breeding' and 'Number of pairs possibly or probably breeding'.

Within each species account, numbers given in the format '1-4 pairs' indicate (in this case) one proven breeding pair and a possible maximum total of four breeding pairs. In the tables, zeros mean that there were no birds recorded in that area in that year, whereas a rule (-) indicates that no data were received.

## Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

2003 Four sites: four pairs. 2004 Six sites: seven pairs. In both years, three pairs bred in Shetland, fledging a total of 13 young in 2003 and 14 in 2004. After successful breeding in the Outer Hebrides in 2002, two pairs summered in 2003 (one at the 2002 nesting loch) but did not breed and one pair nested in 2004. The pair in Ayrshire bred again in both years and although their provenance is unclear, the remote location of the site points towards a wild origin. Two pairs raised three young between them in Northern Ireland. Summering individuals or pairs of unknown origin were also recorded in Argyll, Cumbria and Gwent (all 2003 only), Borders, Dumfries & Galloway, Highland and Orkney (in both years). Breeding records of known and assumed escapes will be summarised in the Panel's report on rare non-native breeding birds (*Brit. Birds* in press).

#### Scotland, S

Ayrshire 2003 One site: one pair raised two young. Ayrshire 2004 One site: one pair raised one young.

#### Scotland, N & W

Outer Hebrides 2004 One site: one pair reared four young. Shetland 2003 Three sites: three pairs reared broods of

six, four and three. Shetland 2004 Three sites: three pairs reared broods of six, five and three. In addition, one paired with a Mute Swan *C. olor* hatched two chicks, which subsequently died.

Northern Ireland

Co. Londonderry 2004 One site: two pairs raised three young.

## Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

2003 At least 89 sites: 77–121 pairs. 2004 At least 87 sites: 88–159 pairs. Although there are widespread reports of summering birds, the bulk of the breeding population occurs in the north of Britain, especially the Yorkshire Dales, Highland, Orkney and the Outer Hebrides. A significant proportion of breeding records come from RSPB reserves, but this may be a reporting artefact as the most recent breeding population estimate for the UK is considerably higher, at 300–500 breeding pairs (Baker *et al.* 2006).

England, SW

Somerset 2003 One site: ten singles summered. Somerset 2004 One site: six singles summered.

England, SE

Essex 2003 Three sites: one pair bred and four other pairs summered. Essex 2004 Three sites: one pair bred and four other pairs summered. Hertfordshire 2004 One site: one summering male. Kent 2003 Summering at seven sites. Kent 2004 Two extensive sites: 7–13 birds summered. Oxfordshire 2004 One site: four pairs probably bred.

England, E

Cambridgeshire 2003 Four sites: up to six pairs summered. Cambridgeshire 2004 Four sites: two pairs probably bred at one site and four pairs present at three other sites. Norfolk 2003 13 sites: 71 birds summered but no indication of breeding. Norfolk 2004 19 sites: eight pairs probably bred at five sites; 68 birds summered at 14 other sites. Suffolk 2003 Four sites: four pairs possibly bred. Suffolk 2004 Seven sites: seven pairs possibly bred.

England, C

Derbyshire 2003 One site: two birds summered. Leicestershire & Rutland 2003 One site: up to six birds summered. Leicestershire & Rutland 2004 Three sites: up to six birds summered.

England, N

Co. Durham 2003 13 sites: at least 28 pairs bred; this number is thought to represent about half of the actual county population. Lancashire & North Merseyside 2003 Seven pairs summered but unlikely to have bred. Greater Manchester 2003 One site: one male summered and a pair was present on one date. Northumberland 2003 Two sites: four pairs bred. Northumberland 2004 Two sites: four pairs bred. Yorkshire 2003 16 pairs raised 29 young in Yorkshire Dales National Park. Yorkshire 2004 15 pairs with at least five confirmed breeding in Yorkshire Dales National Park.

Wales

Anglesey 2004 Two sites: three pairs probably bred. Caernarfon 2003 One site: one pair probably bred. Gwent 2003 One site: one summered. Gwent 2004 One site: four summered.

Scotland, S

Borders 2003 Three sites: one pair bred and two birds summered at two other sites. Borders 2004 Four sites: one pair bred and one pair possibly bred at one site, two pairs possibly bred at two other sites, and one bird summered at a fourth site. Clyde 2004 One site: one pair possibly bred. Dumfries & Galloway 2003 Two sites: one possible and two probable breeding pairs. Dumfries & Galloway 2004 One site: one pair probably bred. Lothian 2003 One site: one pair possibly bred. Lothian 2004 Two sites: two birds summered.

Scotland, Mid

Moray & Nairn 2003 One site: one pair bred. Moray & Nairn 2004 One site: one pair bred. North-east Scotland 2003 One site: three pairs probably bred. North-east Scotland 2004 Five sites: five pairs possibly bred. Note that in survey work for the local North-east Scotland Atlas (Francis & Cook in prep.) there were 13 confirmed breeding records in 2002–04. Perth & Kinross 2003 Two sites: one pair bred and one pair possibly bred. Perth & Kinross 2004 Two sites: five pairs bred.

Scotland, N & W

Argyll 2003 Two sites: three pairs bred and three pairs probably bred. Argyll 2004 One site: one pair probably bred. Highland 2003 Ten sites: three pairs bred, 22 pairs probably bred and two birds summered. Highland 2004 Five sites: 40 pairs bred at four sites, one pair present at another. Orkney 2003 Seven sites: seven pairs bred. Orkney 2004 13 sites: 25 pairs bred, five pairs probably bred. Outer Hebrides 2003 Four extensive sites: ten pairs bred, five pairs probably bred, one pair possibly bred and up to 13 birds summered. Outer Hebrides 2004 Three extensive sites: three pairs bred, at least 11 pairs probably bred and ten pairs possibly bred. Shetland 2003 Two sites: two pairs bred. Shetland 2004 Two sites: three pairs bred.

Northern Ireland

Co. Down 2003 One site: three birds summered.



**Gadwall *Anas strepera***

2003 1,413 pairs. 2004 1,520 pairs. Although these figures are maxima for the data received, being sums of confirmed, probable and possible breeding pairs in each year, some counties, especially those with large populations, could provide only a minimum county figure.

Gadwall	2003 Total	2004 Total		2003 Total	2004 Total
England, SW	210	276	England, N	206	181
Avon	5	3	Cheshire & Wirral	46	31
Devon	4	5	Cleveland	10	3
Dorset	30	32	Cumbria	2	2
Gloucestershire	4	9	Greater Manchester	5	9
Hampshire	25	50	Lancashire & N Merseyside	22	29
Isles of Scilly	0	4	Northumberland	13	15
Somerset	138	160	Yorkshire	108	92
Wiltshire	4	13	Wales	41	30
England, SE	310	373	Anglesey	28	26
Bedfordshire	7	7	Brecon	2	0
Berkshire	4	6	Caernarfon	3	0
Buckinghamshire	8	6	Denbigh & Flint	0	1
Essex	57	61	Gwent	8	2
Hertfordshire	95	151	Pembroke	0	1
Kent	135	125	Scotland, S	11	23
Oxfordshire	—	9	Borders	2	2
Surrey	0	3	Clyde	4	18
Sussex	4	5	Dumfries & Galloway	3	3
England, E	424	370	Lothian	2	0
Cambridgeshire	102	73	Scotland, Mid	99	132
Lincolnshire	21	27	Angus & Dundee	6	13
Norfolk	158	179	Fife	0	4
Suffolk	143	91	Perth & Kinross	93	114
England, C	93	97	Upper Forth	0	1
Derbyshire	24	30	Scotland, N & W	19	29
Leicestershire & Rutland	25	22	Argyll	4	2
Shropshire	5	2	Orkney	12	22
Staffordshire	13	10	Outer Hebrides	3	5
Warwickshire	21	18	Northern Ireland	0	9
West Midlands	1	11	Co. Down	0	1
Worcestershire	4	4	Co. Tyrone	0	8

**Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis***

2004 One site: one mixed pair. This is the first time that this species has occurred in the Panel's reports.

England, N

Lancashire & North Merseyside 2004 One male was seen paired with a (presumed) female Eurasian Teal *A. crecca* for three weeks in June. There was no indication that this was not a wild bird.

**Pintail *Anas acuta***

2003 24 sites: 8–37 pairs. 2004 22 sites: 12–22 pairs. The ten-year mean (1995–2004) of maximum total pairs is 36, so 2003 would seem to be a typical year. There was a respectable total of 12 confirmed breeding pairs in 2004, but the number of sites and maximum total pairs were the lowest in the ten-year period. However, only incomplete data for Argyll were available in 2004. Argyll, Orkney and the Outer Hebrides are the strongholds for this species. Summering birds were more widely reported, mostly single males or obvious migrants, but these are excluded from the figures presented here.

England, SE

Essex 2003 Three sites: up to three summering birds only. Essex 2004 One site: one pair bred. Kent 2003 One site: one pair possibly bred. Kent 2004 Three sites: 3–5 summering birds only. Oxfordshire 2004 One site: one pair

probably bred.

England, E

Cambridgeshire 2003 One site: two pairs possibly bred. Cambridgeshire 2004 One site: one pair probably bred. Lincolnshire 2004 One site: one pair possibly bred. Norfolk 2003 Four sites: three pairs probably bred, two pairs possibly bred. Norfolk 2004 Up to 11 single birds summering at four sites. Suffolk 2003 Two sites: two pairs possibly bred. Suffolk 2004 Three sites: up to three summering birds only.

England, N

Cheshire & Wirral 2004 One site: three pairs probably bred.

Wales

Anglesey 2004 One site: one pair probably bred.

Scotland, S

Dumfries & Galloway 2003 One site: one pair bred.

Scotland, Mid

Perth & Kinross 2003 Summering single male only. Perth & Kinross 2004 One site: one pair possibly bred.

Scotland, N & W

Argyll 2003 Five sites: 14 pairs probably bred and one pair possibly bred. Argyll 2004 Two sites: two pairs bred.

Orkney 2003 Three sites: six pairs bred and one pair probably bred. Orkney 2004 Two sites: nine pairs bred.

Outer Hebrides 2003 Three sites: one pair bred and three pairs probably bred. Outer Hebrides 2004 One site: two pairs probably bred.

### Garganey *Anas querquedula*

2003 41 sites: 6–56 pairs. 2004 53 sites: 6–78 pairs. None bred in the Outer Hebrides, where the first breeding record occurred in 2002, but the first confirmed breeding record for Wiltshire occurred in 2003. As in the 2002 report, the data below exclude presumed migrants. The numbers of breeding pairs in 2003 are comparable with those in 2002, although rather more were apparently breeding in 2004.

England, SW

Avon 2003 One site: one pair probably bred. Avon 2004 One site: one pair possibly bred. Devon 2004 One site: one pair probably bred. Gloucestershire 2003 One site: one pair possibly bred. Somerset 2003 Two sites: three pairs probably bred and three pairs possibly bred. Somerset 2004 Two sites: two pairs probably bred and four pairs possibly bred. Wiltshire 2003 One site: one pair bred; this is the first confirmed breeding record for Wiltshire.

England, SE

Bedfordshire 2004 One site: three pairs possibly bred. Essex 2003 Two sites: two pairs probably bred. Essex 2004 One site: one pair possibly bred. Hertfordshire 2003 One site: one pair possibly bred. Kent 2003 Six sites: two pairs bred, four pairs probably bred and four pairs possibly bred. Kent 2004 12 sites: two pairs bred, five pairs probably bred and 11 pairs possibly bred. Sussex 2004 One site: two pairs possibly bred.

England, E

Cambridgeshire 2003 Two sites: six pairs probably bred, one pair possibly bred. Cambridgeshire 2004 Two sites: one pair bred and eight pairs possibly bred. Lincolnshire 2004 Two sites: two pairs possibly bred. Norfolk 2003 Four sites: four pairs probably bred, one pair possibly bred. Norfolk 2004 Ten sites: one pair bred and nine pairs possibly bred. Suffolk 2003 Five sites: two pairs probably bred, three pairs possibly bred. Suffolk 2004 Three sites: three pairs probably bred, three pairs possibly bred.

England, C

Leicestershire & Rutland 2004 Two sites: two pairs possibly bred. Shropshire 2003 One pair probably bred.

England, N

Cleveland 2004 One site: one pair bred, hatching ten young. This is the first breeding record for Cleveland since 1998 and only the second since 1975. Cumbria 2004 Two sites: two pairs possibly bred. Lancashire & North Merseyside 2003 Two sites: two pairs bred. Lancashire & North Merseyside 2004 One site: one pair probably bred. Yorkshire 2003 One site: one pair possibly bred. Yorkshire 2004 Two sites: three pairs probably bred.

Wales

Anglesey 2003 Two sites: three pairs probably bred. Anglesey 2004 One site: one pair possibly bred. Gwent 2004 One site: two pairs possibly bred.

Scotland, S

Clyde 2003 Two sites: two pairs possibly bred. Dumfries & Galloway 2003 Three sites: one pair bred, two pairs possibly bred. Dumfries & Galloway 2004 Two sites: two pairs possibly bred.

Scotland, Mid

North-east Scotland 2003 One site: one pair possibly bred. North-east Scotland 2004 One site: one pair bred. Perth & Kinross 2003 One site: one pair probably bred, one pair possibly bred. Perth & Kinross 2004 Two sites: one pair probably bred, one pair possibly bred.



Scotland, N &amp; W

Argyll 2003 One site: one pair possibly bred. Argyll 2004 One site: one pair probably bred. Caithness 2004 One site: one pair possibly bred. Highland 2003 One site: one pair possibly bred.

### Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

2003 461 pairs. 2004 482 pairs. The totals here represent a maximum number of pairs reported to the Panel as breeding, as they include all breeding-season records except for singles recorded at a site for one day only and apparent non-breeding flocks. The number of pairs in both years is above the ten-year mean of 436 (range 309–545). The fluctuation in numbers may be purely an artefact of reporting, as numbers for some sites are not always available annually. The majority of breeding Pochards are concentrated in the English coastal counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Kent, which between them accounted for 56% of pairs reported in 2004. This species is more local and much scarcer in most other counties.

Common Pochard	2003 Total	2004 Total		2003 Total	2004 Total
England, SW	42	54	England, N	62	61
Avon	3	2	Cheshire & Wirral	15	15
Devon	3	3	Cleveland	8	8
Dorset	3	5	Greater Manchester	1	1
Gloucestershire	0	2	Lancashire & N Merseyside	12	13
Hampshire	2	6	Northumberland	6	2
Isles of Scilly	4	2	Yorkshire	20	22
Somerset	27	33	Wales	23	30
Wiltshire	0	1	Anglesey	22	27
England, SE	236	208	Brecon	0	1
Bedfordshire	1	1	Caernarfon	1	0
Buckinghamshire	4	0	Gwent	0	2
Essex	53	43	Scotland, S	5	2
Hertfordshire	22	11	Borders	4	0
Kent	156	141	Clyde	0	1
Oxfordshire	—	12	Dumfries & Galloway	1	1
England, E	76	111	Lothian	0	0
Cambridgeshire	7	12	Scotland, Mid	4	3
Lincolnshire	7	11	Angus & Dundee	0	0
Norfolk	39	59	Fife	2	—
Suffolk	23	29	Perth & Kinross	2	3
England, C	6	6	Scotland, N & W	5	6
Leicestershire & Rutland	0	2	Caithness	—	1
Shropshire	2	2	Highland	1	0
Warwickshire	2	0	Orkney	3	4
Worcestershire	2	2	Outer Hebrides	1	1
			Northern Ireland	2	1
			Co. Londonderry	2	1

### Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*

2003 One site: one male present. 2004 One site: one mixed pair hatched two young. Ring-necked Ducks were previously reported paired with Common Pochards in both 1977 and 1998 but no young have been recorded before.

England, E

Lincolnshire 2003 Single male for nine days in May.

Scotland, N &amp; W

Outer Hebrides 2004 One male, present from late April to mid September, paired with a female Tufted Duck *A. fuligula*. Two young hatched but are not known to have fledged.

### Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*

2003 Three sites: 0–3 pairs. 2004 Five sites: 0–8 pairs. A welcome increase in reports, but no firm evidence of breeding. Female Scaups appear to have been in short supply in 2004.



Kit Day

145. Male Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*, with Tufted Duck *A. fuligula*, Swadlincote, Derbyshire, April 2007.

Scotland, S

Lothian 2003 One site: male present at an inland reservoir in June and July, and a juvenile seen there in September; the youngster may not have been raised locally.

Scotland, Mid

Perth & Kinross 2004 One site: four males and two females on one date in May.

Scotland, N & W

Highland 2003 Two sites: (1) male present in June and July; (2) male on one date in May. Highland 2004 Two sites: (1) male in May appeared to be paired with a Tufted Duck; (2) male on one date in July also possibly paired with a Tufted Duck. Outer Hebrides 2004 Two sites: (1) pair on one date in May and single males on nearby lochs on two other dates in May; (2) male from late May into June, loosely associating with two pairs of Tufted Ducks.

### Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*

2003 One site: one male summered.

England, N

Cumbria 2003 One male remained during summer.

### Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

2003 Nine sites: 12–25 pairs. 2004 Five sites: 0–15 pairs. The overall numbers appear to be much lower than in the mid 1990s, and a decline on Islay, Argyll, was noted specifically. The records here relate to data from RSPB reserves plus some casual reports. The stronghold now appears to be in Highland, where 21 pairs bred or probably bred in 2003. A full survey is planned for 2007.

Scotland, S

Lothian 2003 Two sites: (1) six males on one date in June; (2) 14 males on one date in July.

Scotland, Mid

Perth & Kinross 2003 One site: one pair with brood of four in July. Perth & Kinross 2004 One site: one pair possibly bred.

Scotland, N & W

Argyll 2003 Two sites: 2–3 pairs possibly bred. Argyll 2004 One site: one pair possibly bred. Highland 2003 Four sites: (1) ten pairs raised 43 young; (2) nine pairs probably bred, but no young seen; (3) one pair hatched four young but none fledged; (4) one pair probably bred, but no young seen. Highland 2004 Three sites: (1) one pair probably bred; (2) three pairs probably bred; (3) nine pairs probably bred.

### Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

2003 104–156 pairs bred in three regions of Scotland, and birds summered in three other areas of Scotland and England. 2004 98–146 pairs bred in three regions of Scotland, and birds summered in



three other areas of Scotland and England. Details received from the Goldeneye Study Group indicate that a minimum of 97 clutches in 2003 and 88 clutches in 2004 were laid in nestboxes in Badenoch & Strathspey. In 2003, 75 of the 97 clutches were incubated and 53 were successful with a mean brood-size of 8.4 young (range 2–20). In 2004, 59 were incubated and 46 were successful with a mean brood-size of 8.3 young (range 1–13). It is known that as many as two-thirds of nests contain eggs laid by other females, so the total population in this area in 2003 was estimated at 150 egg-laying females, and an equivalent estimate for 2004 gave 133 egg-laying females.

England, C

Derbyshire 2004 One site: one pair summered. Leicestershire & Rutland 2003 One site: one pair summered.

England, N

Cumbria 2003 Four sites: six females summered. Cumbria 2004 Three sites: two males, one female summered.

Scotland, S

Lothian 2003 One site: up to three summered. Lothian 2004 At least two sites: one pair in June and other summering individuals elsewhere.

Scotland, Mid

North-east Scotland 2003 Two sites: five pairs bred. North-east Scotland 2004 At least nine pairs bred in Deeside, with two broods recorded. Perth & Kinross 2003 One pair bred and up to 67 birds summered at four sites. Perth & Kinross 2004 One site: 1–2 pairs bred.

Scotland, N & W

Highland 2003 One extensive and one other site: 98–150 pairs bred. In addition, a brood of six hatched from a box in Sutherland. Highland 2004 One extensive site: 88–133 pairs bred.

### Smew *Mergellus albellus*

2003 One site: 0–1 pair. 2004 One site: 0–1 pair. Summering birds have been reported before, but the 2003 record hints that breeding may yet occur.

Scotland, S

Clyde 2003 One site: pair copulating at an inland loch in late May.

Scotland, N & W

Highland 2004 One site: male on one date in June.

### Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*

As Capercaillie is now a Schedule 1 species, it has been added to the Panel's list of species to be monitored, and this is the first report to include this dramatic but elusive grouse. The data here are clearly incomplete. A national survey conducted by the RSPB in winter 2003/04 gave an estimate of 1,980 individuals, which compares with 1,073 for the previous comparable survey, in 1998/99. Although this is suggestive of an increase, the fact that it lies within the wide confidence limits of the previous survey means that it does not demonstrate a statistically significant increase. It does, however, suggest that the previous decline has levelled out.

Scotland, Mid

Angus & Dundee 2004 One site: nest with four eggs. Moray & Nairn 2003 Minimum of 15 males. Moray & Nairn 2004 13 males at three sites; also one brood of two. North-east Scotland 2003 Two sites: (1) five males and one female in April; (2) two males and one female in April. Perth & Kinross 2003 One site: one female in April. Perth & Kinross 2004 Three sites: three separate individuals in January and April. Upper Forth 2003 No birds believed to be present in Stirlingshire.

Scotland, N & W

Highland 2003 Population estimated at 40–66 males. Data were received from four nests, with a total of 33 eggs. Highland 2004 Data from three nests, with a total of 22 eggs.

### Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

2003 4–320 pairs. 2004 18–407 pairs. The majority of reports of Common Quail refer to singing males, many of which are recorded for one date only, and it is not known how many of these relate to breeding attempts. Given the species' preferred habitat of arable fields, which are both extensive and not well checked by birdwatchers, the upper estimates of the totals given here are probably minima for each year. Clearly there were more Quails around in 2004 than in 2003, and although the figure of 407 pairs is close to the ten-year mean of 402, the total of 18 confirmed pairs is the highest since the 'Quail year' of 1989. The table shows the combined totals of calling birds, pairs and broods reported to the Panel, with the

number of confirmed pairs in parentheses after the total. All confirmed records relate to broods seen.

Common Quail	2003 Total (confirmed)	2004 Total (confirmed)		2003 Total (confirmed)	2004 Total (confirmed)
England, SW	53	105 (1)	Isle of Man	2	—
Avon	2	16	Lancashire &	8	5
Dorset	8	12	N Merseyside		
Gloucestershire	5	5	Northumberland	6	7
Hampshire	11	15	Yorkshire	20	13
Somerset	—	5	Wales	8	12
Wiltshire	27	52 (1)	Anglesey	3	—
England, SE	28	48	Brecon	—	2
Bedfordshire	7	1	Caernarfon	—	2
Berkshire	—	9	Ceredigion	2	1
Buckinghamshire	5	7	Denbigh & Flint	—	1
Essex	3	9	Glamorgan	1	1
Hertfordshire	4	2	Montgomery	—	2
Kent	6	—	Pembroke	2	3
Oxfordshire	—	1	Scotland, S	17 (1)	23 (4)
Sussex	3	19	Borders	9 (1)	15
England, E	73 (1)	86 (7)	Lothian	8	8 (4)
Cambridgeshire	15	19	Scotland, Mid	47 (1)	53 (1)
Lincolnshire	17	21 (7)	Angus & Dundee	18	14
Norfolk	39 (1)	39	Fife	5 (1)	3
Suffolk	2	7	Moray & Nairn	4	2
England, C	23	22 (3)	North-east Scotland	16	31 (1)
Derbyshire	5	7	Perth & Kinross	4	—
Leicestershire & Rutland	5	3	Upper Forth	—	3
Shropshire	6	9 (2)	Scotland, N & W	10 (1)	19
Staffordshire	1	—	Fair Isle	1 (1)	—
Warwickshire	6	3 (1)	Highland	1	7
England, N	60	38 (2)	Orkney	1	4
Cheshire & Wirral	10	11 (2)	Shetland	7	8
Cleveland	4	—	Northern Ireland	1	1
Cumbria	5	2	Co. Armagh	1	—
Greater Manchester	5	—	Co. Antrim	—	1

### Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

Baker *et al.* (2006) estimated the British population of Red-throated Divers at 935–1,500 pairs. The Panel received casual data for over 200 pairs in both years under review, but only the results of long-term monitoring studies and records away from the main nesting areas in north and west Scotland are listed here. In Orkney, 2004 was the most successful season for at least eight years, contrasting with poor seabird success. The high productivity was possibly due to reduced chick predation by Great Skuas *Stercorarius skua*; that species left its breeding grounds early owing to breeding failures. In contrast, Shetland had its poorest season since studies began in 1979, with chicks dying of starvation or predation. The following information on productivity is from the RSPB's regular monitoring sites.

#### Scotland, S

Clyde 2003 Two sites: (1) pair laid eggs but failed; (2) pair probably bred but one of pair found shot. Clyde 2004 Two sites: (1) pair on territory but did not nest; (2) single on one date only. Clyde Islands 2003 Three pairs raised five young on Arran. Clyde Islands 2004 Three pairs raised three young on Arran.

#### Scotland, Mid

Moray & Nairn 2003 One site: one pair possibly bred Moray & Nairn 2004 One site: pair on one date only. North-east Scotland 2003 One site: two pairs probably bred. North-east Scotland 2004 One site: one pair probably bred. Perth & Kinross 2004 One site: one pair probably bred. Upper Forth 2003 No birds at a former regular site for the third consecutive year.

#### Scotland, N & W

Orkney 2003 On Hoy, a survey located 64 pairs; 32 pairs fledged 40 young (0.63 young per occupied site). On



Mainland, 17 pairs bred on Birsay Moors and 14 of these raised 13 young (0.76 young per occupied site). Elsewhere in Orkney, at least 16 pairs also bred. Orkney 2004 On Hoy, a full survey located 56 pairs; 38 pairs fledged 53 young (0.95 young per occupied site). On Mainland (including Birsay Moors), 20 pairs raised 20 chicks (1.00 young per occupied site). Elsewhere in Orkney, at least nine pairs also bred. Shetland 2003 Site occupancy at study areas on three islands was down, with five pairs on Unst at Hermaness (productivity 0.20 young per laying pair), 19 pairs on Fetlar (0.63) and eight pairs on Foula (0.88). Shetland 2004 Details for three study areas were six pairs at Hermaness (productivity 0.83 young per laying pair), 20 pairs on Fetlar (0.25) and seven pairs on Foula (0.57).

## Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*

2003 140 sites checked, 114 Apparently Occupied Territories (AOT) found. 2004 187 sites checked, 149 AOT found. Monitoring by RSPB of Black-throated Diver lochs showed again that those nesting on rafts provided for them raised more young than those which chose natural sites.

2003 42 out of 51 raft territories were occupied and 33 raft-nesting pairs fledged 24 chicks (0.73 young per laying pair). Breeding was not proven at five occupied raft territories and four pairs in raft territories used natural sites. Only three young fledged from 18 pairs proved breeding at non-raft nests on the North Scotland mainland (0.17 young per laying pair).

2004 38 raft-nesting pairs fledged 16 chicks (0.42 young per laying pair). On the North Scotland mainland, 48 pairs were proved breeding at natural nest-sites and fledged 12 young (0.25 young per laying pair).

## Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*



Hugh Harrop

146. Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*, Grutness, Shetland, June 2003.

Scotland, S

2003 One site: one at the 2001 breeding site between 1st May and 2nd June.

Scotland, Mid

2003 One site: one present 17th May to 6th July. 2004 Two sites: (1) one male on 25th July; (2) presumed same male at a nearby site on 26th July.

2003 One site: 0–1 pair. The last time the Panel reported possible breeding was in 1997, when a pair with a juvenile was seen landing on the sea in late July.

Scotland, N & W

Outer Hebrides 2003 One site: pair displaying on the sea close to a potential breeding loch in July.

## Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*

2003 Four sites: four singles in summer. 2004 Four sites: three singles in summer. As there has been no further indication of breeding since the first confirmed case in 2001, it seems that the status of Red-necked Grebe has returned to one of single summer-plumaged adults summering on inland waters.

England, SE

2004 One site: one present 17th May to 6th July.

England, E

2003 Two sites: (1) one present 26th May to 27th October; (2) one present 13th April to 31st July. Neither of these sites was where Red-necked Grebes have regularly summered before, but there were no records from this county in 2004.

England, C

2004 One site: one remained from 2003 until 14th May.

### Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus*

2003 16 sites: 43 pairs raised 37 young. 2004 14 sites: 51 pairs raised 24 young. The number of Slavonian Grebes in 2004 was the highest since 1997, but the productivity was poor at 0.47 young per territorial pair. In comparison, the equivalent figure for 2003 was 0.84, the fourth highest on record. The long-term average is 0.58 young per territorial pair. Loch Ruthven remains the main site, with around half of the total breeding population, as in 2002. The proportion of the year's total young produced at Loch Ruthven was 57% in 2003 but only 17% in 2004. There continues to be a reduction in the total number of sites and the transitory nature of many sites is demonstrated by the fact that only nine lochs held pairs in both 2003 and 2004. Each year all sites with a history of occupation in the last 20 years are monitored, so it is believed that the totals reported here are complete.

Scotland, Mid and N & W

2003 16 sites: (1) Loch Ruthven: 20 pairs reared 16 young, nine singles also present; (2)–(16) 23 pairs reared 21 young. One further site held just one bird. 2004 14 sites: (1) Loch Ruthven: 27 pairs reared four young, five singles also present; (2)–(14) 24 pairs reared 20 young. A further four sites held just single birds.

Slavonian Grebe	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
No. sites	27	24	22	22	21	15	18	16	16	14
Confirmed pairs	58	50	53	42	35	31	40	46	44	51
Young reared	47	17	15	16	12	33	41	36	37	24
Young/territorial pair	0.81	0.34	0.28	0.38	0.34	1.06	1.03	0.78	0.84	0.47

### Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

2003 22 sites: 44–59 pairs bred. 2004 25 sites: 43–67 pairs bred. Northern England remains the stronghold for Black-necked Grebes in the UK, holding almost 70% of the confirmed nests in 2004. In Scotland, however, former nesting sites are being deserted or hold fewer birds: only one young was fledged there in 2004. A full analysis of breeding by Black-necked Grebes in Britain is published elsewhere in this issue (Martin & Smith 2007). As a consequence of this analysis, the number of sites and pairs in the table in this report have been updated to include only sites judged to hold confirmed, probable or possible breeding pairs.

England, SW

Avon 2003 Single bird in March. Avon 2004 Single bird in April. Gloucestershire 2004 Two sites: (1) one pair fledged one young; (2) pair mated and built a nest in June but then moved on. Hampshire 2003 One site: one pair present in June and July. Hampshire 2004 One site: one pair bred but the single young did not survive.

England, SE

Essex 2003 Two sites: (1) pair present March to July, but did not breed; (2) pair reported on two dates in June and July also did not breed. Essex 2004 One site: one pair present until April but not subsequently. No birds at the other 2003 site. Hertfordshire 2003 One site: five pairs fledged ten young. Singles also reported briefly at two other sites. Hertfordshire 2004 Two sites: (1) eight pairs fledged 12 young; (2) a pair displaying in March did not stay. Kent 2003 One site: one pair fledged two young.

England, E

Lincolnshire 2003 One site: one pair fledged three young, plus one other adult. Lincolnshire 2004 Three sites: (1) one pair bred; (2)–(3) two single pairs did not linger.

England, C

Leicestershire & Rutland 2003 Five adults on one date in April at a former breeding site. Leicestershire & Rutland 2004 A pair at one site, singles at two other sites, all present for one day only. Nottinghamshire 2003 One site: three pairs present, two pairs bred and fledged three young; one adult also present in breeding season at another site. Nottinghamshire 2004 Two sites: (1) four pairs present, three pairs bred and two of these fledged three young; (2) one pair, breeding suspected but not proven. Staffordshire 2004 One site: one pair fledged two young despite disturbance at this unprotected site.

England, N

Cheshire & Wirral 2003 Two sites: (1) 11 pairs fledged five young; (2) two pairs fledged three young. Cheshire & Wirral 2004 Two sites: (1) ten pairs fledged 14 young and one other pair possibly bred. At least four pairs laid second clutches but no young were raised; (2) one pair fledged one young. Cleveland 2004 One site: one pair attempted to breed but did not lay following harassment by Common Coots *Fulica atra*. Greater Manchester 2003 One site: five pairs fledged ten young. Greater Manchester 2004 One site: four pairs bred, each raising second



broods, with a total of 16 young fledging. Ten hatched and eight fledged from the first broods. The second broods fledged eight young from eight hatched, a remarkable success rate for this species. **Northumberland 2003** Four sites: (1) five pairs fledged six young; (2) one pair laid eggs but displaced by Coots; four other pairs present but did not breed; (3) one pair attempted to breed but displaced by Coots; (4) display by two pairs noted in late April with third pair present, but none later in season. **Northumberland 2004** One site: 5–6 pairs bred raising 11–12 young. **Yorkshire 2003** Three sites: (1) two pairs fledged three young; (2) one pair fledged two young; (3) one pair fledged two young. **Yorkshire 2004** Four sites: (1) four pairs bred and six pairs probably bred, producing at least 11 young; (2) two pairs bred but one clutch was predated and the other pair deserted; (3) one pair raised two young and one pair possibly bred; (4) one pair present in June and July was seen to collect nest material.

Scotland, S

**Borders 2003** Two sites: (1) four pairs and four single birds present, one pair fledged three young; (2) one pair fledged three young. **Borders 2004** One site: one pair raised one young, two other pairs present but did not breed. This site has become more unsuitable because of the loss of emergent vegetation. In addition, one single on one date at another former breeding site.

Scotland, Mid

**Angus & Dundee 2003** One site: one pair bred. **Angus & Dundee 2004** One bird on one date in April only. **Fife 2003** One site: three pairs nested but failed due to flooding. **Fife 2004** One site: one pair present but did not breed. **North-east Scotland 2004** One site: one pair probably bred. **Perth & Kinross 2003** One site: one pair fledged one young and incubated a second clutch, success unknown. **Perth & Kinross 2004** One site: pair displaying and carrying nest material in May, but did not stay.

Black-necked Grebe	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
No. sites	16	16	12	16	20	20	20	20	22	25
Confirmed pairs	32	25	18	50	39	47	41	48	44	43
Max. total pairs	49	38	22	58	51	57	63	57	59	67

### Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*

No meaningful data received. The UK population was given as 48,047 pairs in Baker *et al.* (2006).

Scotland, N & W

**Shetland 2004** The only information received was from the Ramna Stacks and Gruney RSPB reserve, where 30 burrows were checked for occupancy. Ten were found to be occupied.

### Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

**2003** 34 sites: 43–52 booming males, with 34 confirmed nests. **2004** 37 sites: 55–69 booming males, with 31 confirmed nests.

England, SW

**2003** One site: one booming male. **2004** One site: one booming male.

England, SE

**Kent 2003** Three sites: 1–2 booming males. **Kent 2004** Four sites: 3–5 booming males. Elsewhere **2003** Two sites: 1–2 booming males in two counties.

England, E

**Cambridgeshire 2003** Three sites: three booming males. **Cambridgeshire 2004** Three sites: 2–3 booming males. **Lincolnshire 2003** Four sites: 4–5 booming males and five confirmed nests. **Lincolnshire 2004** Six sites: 6–8 booming males and four confirmed nests. **Norfolk 2003** *North Norfolk coast* One site: one booming male. **Norfolk Broads** Ten sites: 12–15 booming males and seven confirmed nests. **Norfolk 2004** *North Norfolk coast* Three sites: 2–3 booming males and two confirmed nests. **Norfolk Broads** Nine sites: 17–23 booming males and seven confirmed nests. **Suffolk 2003** Six sites: 18–19 booming males and 20 confirmed nests. **Suffolk 2004** Six sites: 19–21 booming males and 15 confirmed nests.

England, N

**Lancashire & North Merseyside 2003** One site: one booming male and two confirmed nests. **Lancashire & North Merseyside 2004** One site: one booming male and two confirmed nests. **Yorkshire 2003** Three sites: 1–3 booming males. **Yorkshire 2004** Three sites: three booming males and one confirmed nest.

Wales

**2004** One site: one booming male.

Simon Wotton, RSPB, has commented as follows: 'The number of confirmed Bitterns increased sharply

Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

Alan Harris

between 2002 and 2004, from 31 to 55 booming males. Much of this increase was from the Norfolk Broads and Humber populations. In 2004, more than one “boomer” was heard on the North Norfolk coast for the first time in six years, and booming was heard at three new sites in the Humber area. The 2004 figure actually exceeded the UK Biodiversity Action Plan target of 50 booming males by 2010.

‘There was a big jump in the number of nests in 2003, from 26 in 2002 to 34, although there was a slight drop in 2004. The Suffolk coast is the stronghold for nesting Bitterns in the UK, and Minsmere is the prime site, with 11 nests in 2003 and nine in 2004. It is interesting to note that the increase in the number of booming males at the Humber sites has been matched by an increase in the number of nests, with five nests recorded in that area in both years.

‘Of the 55 booming males present in 2004, 35% were on sites that are immediately threatened by sea-level rise, and this proportion was even higher for the breeding females, with over 50% in danger. As new reedbed sites are created away from the coast, it is hoped that ultimately birds will colonise these sites and secure a more stable future for the Bittern in the UK.

‘The research and monitoring of Bitterns in the UK is led by RSPB and Natural England, but also involves many other organisations, landowners and volunteers. The second EU-Life programme (2002–2006) provided major funding for habitat creation and restoration at 20 sites.’

### Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*

2003 One site: 0–1 pairs. 2004 One site: 0–1 pairs. These are the first records of this species in the Panel’s reports since 1997, when a male was reported singing in June in eastern England. A number of Little Bitterns occur as overshooting migrants in most springs in southern England. The Panel aims to publish records of singing males or individuals in suitable nesting habitat. The only confirmed breeding record of Little Bitterns in the UK was in 1984, when a pair raised two young in South Yorkshire.

England, SE

Kent 2003 One site: one male singing 11th–18th May.

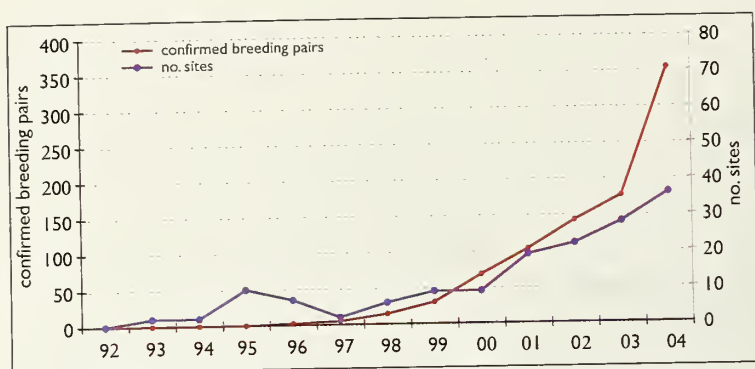
England, E

Lincolnshire 2004 One site: one male in suitable habitat in June.

### Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

2003 28 sites: 176–186 pairs. 2004 36 sites: 354–357 pairs. Numbers in 2003 appear to be only a little higher than those in 2002, but a count for one large colony in Essex (32 pairs in 2002) was not available so the real total may have been around 220 pairs. However, a substantial increase in 2004 is apparent, with a record total of sites and pairs. New colonies were again reported in the core range in





**Fig. 2.** The rapid growth in the number of nesting pairs of Little Egrets *Egretta garzetta* in the UK continues, and although most growth in the numbers of pairs is within established colonies along the east and southeast coasts of England, with modest increase or stability elsewhere, there were still ten new sites occupied in 2004.

south and east England. Buckinghamshire, Ceredigion and Gloucestershire all reported their first breeding records. Numbers in Wales and North England seem to be stalling, however, and the species remains a scarce visitor to Scotland. In Northern Ireland the number of records continues to increase and Little Egret now breeds in the Republic of

Ireland. The largest colonies in 2004 included here were at Foulness, Essex, with 51 pairs and at Northward Hill, Kent, with 45 pairs.

#### England, SW

Avon 2003 One site: one pair copulating in April. Avon 2004 No breeding but up to 15 adults summered. Devon 2003 One site: nine pairs bred. Devon 2004 Two sites: 22 pairs bred. Dorset 2003 Two sites: 48 pairs bred. Dorset 2004 Four sites: 50 pairs bred. Gloucestershire 2003 One site: one pair bred. Gloucestershire 2004 One (different) site: two pairs bred. Hampshire 2003 Two sites: 21–25 pairs bred. Hampshire 2004 Three sites: 33 pairs bred. Somerset 2003 Two sites: four pairs bred and two pairs probably bred. Somerset 2004 Four sites: eight pairs bred, three pairs possibly bred. Wiltshire 2003 One site: two pairs bred. Wiltshire 2004 One site: three pairs bred.

#### England, SE

Buckinghamshire 2003 One site: one pair bred. Buckinghamshire 2004 One site: one pair bred. Essex 2003 Two sites (1) not counted but similar to 2002 when 32 pairs; (2) two pairs bred. Essex 2004 Three sites: 62 pairs bred. Hertfordshire 2003 Recorded from four sites during spring but no breeding. Hertfordshire 2004 Recorded from three sites during spring, including from a heronry, but again not thought to have bred. Kent 2003 Two sites: 40 pairs bred. Kent 2004 Two sites: 55 pairs bred. Sussex 2003 Three sites: four pairs bred. Sussex 2004 Five sites: 17 pairs bred.

#### England, E

Cambridgeshire 2003 No breeding reports. Cambridgeshire 2004 One site: at least 12 pairs bred. Lincolnshire 2003 & 2004 Birds summering but no evidence of breeding. Norfolk 2003 Two sites: 21 pairs bred. Norfolk 2004 Three sites: 55 pairs bred. Suffolk 2003 Two sites: 14 pairs bred. Suffolk 2004 Three sites: 26 pairs bred. In both years recorded at another site but nesting not attempted.

#### England, N

Cheshire & Wirral 2003 Present at one site but did not breed. Cheshire & Wirral 2004 One site: a wild bird paired with an escape from Chester Zoo bred, but it is not known if young were reared. Cumbria 2003 Two sites: two pairs displaying but did not breed. Cumbria 2004 No breeding reports. Lancashire & North Merseyside 2003 Reports of up to six escaped birds, no breeding. Lancashire & North Merseyside 2004 No breeding reports.

#### Wales

Anglesey 2003 One site: three pairs bred. Anglesey 2004 Present but did not breed at site used in 2002–03. Ceredigion 2003 No breeding reports. Ceredigion 2004 One site: two pairs bred. Gwent 2003 One site: five pairs bred. Gwent 2004 One site: five pairs bred. Pembroke 2003 One site: one pair bred.

### Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

After successful breeding in 1999 and nest-building in Suffolk in 2002, nest-building was again seen in 2004, at a new site in northern England.

#### England, SE

Kent 2003 An adult was present in a heronry throughout April, but no nest was built. During April to August, 1–2 birds were also present at three other sites but with no indication of breeding.

#### England, E

Suffolk 2003 One site: up to 11 birds at the colony where nest-building occurred in 2002 but none was present in

May or June. 2004 One site: two adults and two first-year birds visited the site but no breeding was attempted. England, N

2004 One site: three summering birds were seen displaying and nest-building.

### Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

2003 16–41 pairs; a minimum of 30 young fledged. 2004 19–41 pairs; a minimum of 28 young fledged. It is believed that data were received by the Panel from most areas of Britain where Honey-buzzards are known to breed, for both 2003 and 2004, although these totals may still underestimate the population, especially in remote areas. The maximum total number of pairs and the number of pairs for which breeding was confirmed are a little higher than the figures reported during the 1990s, but lower than the apparent peaks of 2000 and 2001 when a special effort was made to find and record all Honey-buzzards in Britain (*Brit. Birds* 94: 143–144). A decline in the wasp (Hymenoptera) population in SW England was noted in 2003, and two apparent nest robberies occurred in 2004; these factors will not assist any expansion of the population. In 2003, 14 pairs fledged two young and two pairs fledged one young. In 2004, one pair fledged three young, 11 pairs fledged two young and three pairs fledged one young; two pairs failed at the egg stage and the number fledged at the remaining nests was unknown.

England

2003 30 territories occupied; 11 pairs bred, raising 20 young. 2004 30 territories occupied; 14 pairs bred, raising 25 young.

Wales

2003 Six territories occupied; four pairs bred, raising eight young. 2004 Seven territories occupied; four pairs bred, raising just one young.

Scotland

2003 Five territories occupied; one pair bred, raising two young. 2004 Four territories occupied; one pair bred, raising two young.

Honey-buzzard	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Confirmed pairs	9	14	14	17	13	33	27	20	16	19
Max. total pairs	30	34	39	37	43	69	54	34	34	41

### Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

2003 A minimum of 533 pairs; fledging at least 689 young. 2004 A minimum of 646 pairs; fledging at least 892 young. In the years under review, kites bred in Wales and in the six areas of England and Scotland where release programmes had been completed or were still underway. These areas are (in England) Chilterns, Northamptonshire and Yorkshire and (in Scotland) Highland, Upper Forth and Dumfries & Galloway. Some breeding was also reported away from these release areas, and this is summarised here alongside the information on the monitored Welsh population and from the release areas. During the period under review, releases continued only in Dumfries & Galloway in both 2003 and 2004. A new release area ('Northern Kites') started close to Gateshead, Tyne & Wear, in June 2004 (see [www.northernkites.org.uk](http://www.northernkites.org.uk)). For further information on all Red Kite monitoring schemes, see [www.gigrin.co.uk](http://www.gigrin.co.uk).

England, S

Chilterns The core area for this population is the Oxfordshire/Buckinghamshire border. The Panel also received data from some other counties which probably relate to birds derived from this population. These birds are listed separately below, to document the spread away from the core area, but these pairs are included in the totals for southern England in the table below. Note that, for convenience, Somerset is treated here as southern England. 2003 A total of 177 breeding pairs were located and at least 163 pairs were successful with about 312 young fledging. 2004 213 pairs were located of which 205 were successful, rearing approximately 383 young. Berkshire & Essex 2003 & 2004 Red Kites were present during the breeding season, but no nesting was reported. Devon 2004 One pair attempted to breed but failed. Gloucestershire 2003 One pair present but did not breed. Gloucestershire 2004 A single bird on one date only. Hampshire 2003 One pair bred, fledging two young. Hampshire 2004 One pair bred, fledging two young. Recent breeding was also reported from this county in 1995 and 1996. Somerset 2003 One pair displaying but did not breed. Somerset 2004 One pair laid eggs but failed at that stage. Sussex 2003 Two sites: two pairs displaying but did not breed. Sussex 2004 One pair bred, fledging two young. This is the first



breeding record in Sussex since the early nineteenth century. **Wiltshire 2003** Two sites: (1) one pair bred fledging three young; (2) one pair failed. **Wiltshire 2004** Two pairs bred fledging five young.

England, E

**Cambridgeshire 2004** Two sites: (1) one pair bred fledging two young; (2) used nest found in 2005. **Lincolnshire 2003** Two pairs resident in suitable nesting habitat but no breeding attempts. **Lincolnshire 2004** 1–2 birds present and breeding suspected. **Northamptonshire 2003** 24 breeding pairs were located, an increase of only one on 2002. 21 pairs were successful and 45 young fledged. **Northamptonshire 2004** 27 nests were successful, with 61 young raised. There was no expansion in breeding range although much suitable woodland in the core area remains unoccupied.

England, C

**Derbyshire 2004** One bird in suitable habitat in March and April. **Herefordshire 2004** One pair fledged one young. **Shropshire 2003** Red Kites were present during the breeding season, but no nesting was reported. **Shropshire 2004** Two sites with frequent records of one bird at each.

England, N

**Yorkshire 2003** 16 breeding pairs raised 32 young. **Yorkshire 2004** 27 territorial pairs were located, of which 24 made breeding attempts and 44 young fledged. Encouragingly, a number of pairs nested away from the release area.

Wales

Total coverage of the Welsh kites is no longer possible. The estimated total numbers of pairs and young fledged in Wales in 2003 are 350–400 and 273–312 respectively, and the equivalent figures for 2004 are 400–450 and 361–400. **2003** 299 territories were occupied and 259 monitored. There were at least 147 successful nests, with a minimum of 194 young fledged. Productivity was lower than usual at 0.75 young per territorial pair at monitored sites. Most failures occurred at the time of hatching, which coincided with a period of heavy rain. **2004** 369 territories were occupied and 320 monitored. There were at least 200 successful nests, with a minimum of 286 young fledged.

Scotland, S

**Dumfries & Galloway 2003** Four pairs laid eggs and one chick fledged, the first for the release programme in this area and the first breeding in Dumfries & Galloway for over 120 years. **Dumfries & Galloway 2004** Seven territories were occupied and three nests with eggs were found. Two were successful, rearing three chicks.

Scotland, Mid

**Perth & Kinross/Upper Forth 2003** 19 territorial pairs were located, 18 pairs laid eggs and 14 pairs fledged 34 young. **Perth & Kinross/Upper Forth 2004** 23 pairs were located and 22 went on to lay eggs. Of these, 17 pairs raised 32 young, giving 1.45 young per laying pair, the lowest since 2000, perhaps due to persistent rain when broods had recently hatched.

Scotland, N & W

**Highland 2003** The North Scotland reintroduction project started at the same time as that in the Chilterns, but by contrast the population in Highland remains stable at 35 pairs. A total of 33 pairs fledged 71 young, lower than in 2002. It is believed that numbers here are being suppressed by illegal persecution. **Highland 2004** For the third year in a row the breeding population remained at 35 pairs despite excellent productivity during this period, again pointing to persecution of dispersing young kites. Adults tend to be resident on their territories and have high survival rates. In total, 42 territories were occupied, 35 pairs bred and 30 pairs were successful, rearing 80 young. Mean brood size was a healthy 2.29 young per laying pair.

Northern Ireland

**2003** Only one bird was present at a site where breeding was attempted in 2002.

Red Kite	Breeding pairs monitored	2003 Young fledged	Young per monitored pair	Breeding pairs monitored	2004 Young fledged	Young per monitored pair
England, S	177	312	1.76	213	383	1.80
England, E	24	45	1.88	28	63	2.25
England, C	0	0	–	1	1	1.00
England, N	16	32	2.00	24	44	1.83
Wales (min)	259	194	0.75	320	286	0.89
Scotland, S	4	1	0.25	3	3	1.00
Scotland, Mid	18	34	1.89	22	32	1.45
Scotland, N	35	71	2.03	35	80	2.29
TOTAL	533	689	1.29	646	892	1.38

### White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

2003 31 territorial pairs of which 25 bred, rearing 26 young. 2004 32 territorial pairs of which 28 bred, rearing 19 young. The reintroduced population of White-tailed Eagles in Scotland increased a little in the two years under review, to a new high of 32 territorial pairs in 2004, of which 28 laid eggs. Productivity was higher in 2003, when 26 young fledged from 16 successful nests, making it the most successful year since the start of the reintroduction project in 1975.

White-tailed Eagle	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Territorial pairs	11	12	14	19	20	22	23	25	31	32
Clutches laid	10	12	11	16	16	19	17	22	25	28
Successful pairs	5	7	5	9	6	8	7	8	16	15
Young reared	7	9	9	13	11	12	11	12	26	19
Young/breeding pair	0.70	0.75	0.64	0.81	0.69	0.63	0.65	0.55	1.04	0.68
Young/territorial pair	0.64	0.75	0.64	0.68	0.55	0.55	0.48	0.48	0.84	0.59

### Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

2003 205–233 pairs. 2004 249–284 pairs. As Marsh Harriers have become more numerous in the core counties of eastern England, the data received have become less detailed and in many areas it is no longer possible to give separate totals of breeding females and males, or of young produced. With totals of 147 pairs proved breeding in 2003 and 190 in 2004 (72% and 76% of the UK totals respectively), eastern England remains the stronghold for Marsh Harriers. This species was the subject of a full survey in 2005, which will be detailed in the Panel's next report.

England, SW

Somerset 2003 One site: one adult female and at least 14 immatures summered. Somerset 2004 One site: one pair bred fledging at least one young.

England, SE

Essex 2003 Seven sites: (1)–(3) nine pairs bred, fledging 14 young; (4)–(7) four pairs probably bred. Essex 2004 Five sites: (1)–(3) six pairs bred, fledging 12–13 young; (4)–(5) three pairs probably bred. Kent 2003 Eight sites (one extensive): 36 pairs bred. Kent 2004 Eight sites (one extensive): 38 pairs bred and six pairs probably bred. Sussex 2004 One site: one pair fledged two young.

England, E

Cambridgeshire 2003 Seven sites: eight pairs bred, fledging 15 young; three pairs probably bred; three pairs possibly bred. Cambridgeshire 2004 Eight sites: eight pairs bred, fledging at least 13 young; one pair probably bred; one pair possibly bred. Lincolnshire 2003 Eight sites (one extensive): 37 pairs bred and two pairs possibly bred. Ten successful nests monitored produced 38 young. Lincolnshire 2004 23 sites (one extensive): 57 pairs bred; nine pairs probably bred and eight pairs possibly bred. Seven successful nests monitored produced 25 young. Norfolk 2003 A minimum of 59 pairs bred and seven pairs probably bred. Norfolk 2004 81 pairs bred and a total of 139 young fledged. Suffolk 2003 13 sites: 43 pairs bred fledging at least 120 young; three pairs probably bred. Suffolk 2004 11 sites: 44 pairs bred fledging at least 107 young; three pairs probably bred and one pair possibly bred.

England, N

Lancashire 2003 One site: three females and one male; three nests from which two broods fledged, with a total of nine young. Lancashire 2004 Three sites: (1) three females and one male; three nests from which two broods fledged, with a total of eight young; (2) one pair fledged four young; (3) two females summered. Yorkshire 2003 Seven sites: four pairs bred and fledged seven young; four pairs probably bred and one pair possibly bred. Yorkshire 2004 One site: four pairs bred fledging six young.

Wales

2003 One site: pair present but no territorial behaviour. 2004 One county: a male ranged across several sites but never in the presence of a female.

Scotland, Mid

North-east Scotland 2004 Two sites: two pairs on territory but did not lay eggs. Tayside 2003 Two sites: five pairs fledged 15 young. Tayside 2004 Two sites: four pairs fledged 13 young.

Scotland, N & W

Highland 2004 One site: one pair on territory but did not lay eggs. Orkney 2003 One site: one pair fledged three young. Orkney 2004 One site: one pair fledged two young.



## Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

2003 403–411 territorial pairs reared at least 618 young. 2004 589 territorial pairs reared at least 722 young. In both years, the selection of records received was, as usual, based on a non-random sample, and the summary of those results is presented in the table below. These cover records of pairs monitored by Raptor Study Groups, where nests are followed through to fledging stage. A pair nested in southern England in 2003, but although a male was present in spring 2004, with a female later, no nesting occurred. In addition, summering birds were reported in eastern England.

Hen Harrier	2003			2004		
Raptor Study Group Areas	Occupied territories	Territories that fledged young	Min. no. young fledged	Occupied territories	Territories that fledged young	Min. no. young fledged
England, N	18–23	8+	16+	11	9+	28+
England, S	1	1	3	0	0	0
Isle of Man	9	–	–	57	–	–
Wales	26	–	70	43	37	64+
Dumfries & Galloway	18	9	26	18	6	15
Lothian & Borders	2	1	5	5	4	14
South Strathclyde	38	14	45	48	19	69
Central Scotland	9	6	16	10	5	12
Tayside	30	16	50	29	19	67
North-east Scotland	18	7	26	14	4	14
Argyll & Bute and Arran	92	59	175	130	73	190
Highland	45	26	94	53	35	121
(incl. west Moray)						
Orkney	51	20	56	74	33	68
Outer Hebrides	32	13	36	34	21	60
Northern Ireland	14–17	–	–	63	–	–
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>403–411</b>	<b>180+</b>	<b>618+</b>	<b>589</b>	<b>265+</b>	<b>722+</b>

[In the table above, '–' indicates that no comparable figures were available, and '+' indicates that some data were unavailable so the totals represent minimum figures.]

The third national survey of Hen Harriers in the UK took place in 2004 (Sim *et al.* in press). This found an estimated 806 territorial pairs in the UK and Isle of Man in 2004, a significant 41% increase from the 1998 estimate of 570 pairs. These figures are higher than the numbers of pairs typically reported to the Panel (compare 2003 and 2004 totals in the table). Increases were found throughout,



147 & 148. Young Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus*, Bowland Fells SSSI, Lancashire, June 2005. Wing-tagging and radio-marking are essential to the study of such a mobile species as Hen Harrier. Since 2002, 84 harriers have been fitted with 'backpack'-mounted radio-transmitters by staff from the Hen Harrier Recovery Project (Natural England, formerly English Nature). The aim of the radio-tracking work is to monitor and record post-natal dispersal. Data from these studies will be used to help to inform land managers along known dispersal routes and in important wintering areas of sympathetic management prescriptions. Sightings of wing-tagged birds can be sent to [davidsowter@freenet.co.uk](mailto:davidsowter@freenet.co.uk) and/or [stephen.murphy@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:stephen.murphy@naturalengland.org.uk).

with the exception of south and east Scotland and England, where numbers decreased. Continuing illegal persecution arising from perceived conflicts between breeding Hen Harriers and driven grouse shooting may be a major cause of these regional declines.

### Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*

2003 9–12 pairs fledged at least 19 young. 2004 10–12 pairs fledged at least 19 young. Montagu's Harriers occurred at a total of nine sites in both 2003 and 2004, a marginal improvement on the eight sites in 2002 but still lower than in any other year since 1993. Productivity though was above average, with 19 young fledging in both years (the ten-year mean for 1995–2004 was 14.8 young).

#### England, SW

2003 Four sites: 1–4 pairs. (1) Pair fledged four young at a traditional site; (2) pair present but did not breed; (3)–(4) male present at both sites, much 'sky-dancing' but failed to attract mate. It is possible that the same male was involved at both sites. 2004 Five sites: 4–5 pairs bred. (1) Pair fledged four young at a traditional site; (2) pair fledged four young; (3)–(4) two pairs bred but number of young fledged unknown; (5) at least one other pair present but no other details.

#### England, SE

2003 Two sites: two pairs bred. (1) Pair fledged three young; (2) pair bred but number of young fledged unknown. 2004 One site: one pair possibly bred, present in suitable habitat in June, close to the site used in 2002, but no further evidence.

#### England, E

2003 Three sites: six pairs bred. (1) Four pairs bred, one failing at the egg stage while the other three fledged a total of six young; (2) one pair fledged four young; (3) one pair fledged two young. 2004 Three sites: six pairs bred. (1) Three pairs bred, with a total of six young fledged; (2) two pairs bred, one failing at the egg stage while the other fledged two young; (3) one pair fledged at least three young.

### Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

2003 203–354 pairs. 2004 213–359 pairs. The quality of data received for this species varies greatly, making it sometimes impossible to avoid double-counting records. We would urge all county recorders and local raptor study groups to assess county populations and provide, as a minimum, numbers of pairs proved breeding and numbers of other pairs probably or possibly breeding. Data are known to be incomplete for Wales.

#### England

2003 Reports from 22 counties: 114 pairs confirmed breeding plus 78 other pairs. 2004 Reports from 20 counties: 103 pairs confirmed breeding plus 55 other pairs.

#### Wales

2003 Reports from nine counties: at least 27 pairs confirmed breeding plus at least 47 other pairs. 2004 Reports from ten counties: at least 43 pairs confirmed breeding plus at least 70 other pairs.

#### Scotland

2003 Reports from five Scottish Raptor Study Group areas: 62 pairs confirmed breeding plus 22 other pairs. 2004 Reports from six Scottish Raptor Study Group areas: 67 pairs confirmed breeding plus 19 other pairs.

#### Northern Ireland

2003 Four pairs reported but breeding not confirmed. 2004 Two pairs reported but breeding not confirmed.

### Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

The third national survey of Golden Eagles was carried out in 2003. Almost 700 known home ranges were checked and 442 of these were occupied by a pair of eagles, compared with 439 in the previous survey in 1992 (using comparable criteria). An additional 71 ranges were occupied by one or more individuals but these lacked either a pair or evidence of a nest being built up. The apparent stability in numbers masks an increase in the Outer Hebrides, with very high densities on Lewis and Harris,

Golden Eagle	Home ranges checked	Home ranges occupied by a pair	Pairs laying eggs	Pairs hatching eggs	Min. young fledged	Mean no. fledged per monitored nest
2003	698	442	262	171	160	0.61
2004	232	194	109	87	97	0.89



whereas decreases were recorded in the eastern and south-central Highlands. Furthermore, there remain many apparently suitable areas unoccupied by eagles, particularly in the south and east of the current range, and there is little evidence of expansion into these localities. The full results are presented in Eaton *et al.* (in press). The pair in northern England built up the nest in 2003 but did not lay; in 2004 the female died and the male remained on site, unpaired.

The table gives the breeding performance of all monitored pairs both in the 2003 survey and in 2004, when a sample of home ranges were monitored as usual by members of the Scottish Raptor Study Groups.

### Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

2003 144–169 pairs. 2004 160–189 pairs. In the main breeding range in Scotland, there were 184 pairs present at nests in 2004. A total of 156 of these laid eggs and 115 fledged 235 young, again setting a new record. The first nesting occurred in Dumfries & Galloway, with one pair there in both years. In Wales, after the first recorded nesting attempt in 2003, two pairs hatched young in 2004. At least one of the Welsh birds originated from the Rutland release scheme. In Rutland itself, two pairs bred for the first time in 2003. There is an increasing incidence of summering birds away from the main breeding areas in Scotland north of the Clyde–Forth valley and where data are available these are listed here as they may indicate future breeding locations.

#### England, C

Leicestershire & Rutland 2003 One site (Rutland Water), three pairs: one pair fledged three young, one pair fledged two young, one pair built a nest but did not lay. Leicestershire & Rutland 2004 One site (Rutland Water), two pairs: one pair bred, fledging two young; one pair present but no breeding attempt; and one single on territory. Northamptonshire 2003 One site: single bird present displaying over nest platform. Northamptonshire 2004 One site: 1–2 birds present displaying over nest platform. Shropshire 2003 One site: single bird present between late March and late June. Shropshire 2004 One site: single bird present between April and July.

#### England, N

Cheshire & Wirral 2003 One bird ranged over several sites in June and July. Cumbria 2003 One site (Bassenthwaite Lake): pair bred, fledging one young. Cumbria 2004 One site (Bassenthwaite Lake): pair bred, fledging one young.

#### Wales

2003 Two sites: (1) pair built nest but did not lay; (2) single bird seen displaying on two dates. 2004 Three sites: (1) pair bred and fledged one young; (2) pair bred, but failed when the two chicks were blown out of the nest in June; (3) single bird summered.

#### Scotland, S

Borders 2003 Three pairs bred, two of which fledged six young. Borders 2004 Three pairs bred, fledging seven young. Clyde 2003 Two sites: (1) pair bred, fledging three young; (2) pair held territory. Clyde 2004 Two sites: (1) pair bred, fledging two young; (2) pair built nest but did not lay. Dumfries & Galloway 2003 One pair fledged one young. Dumfries & Galloway 2004 One pair fledged two young. Lothian 2003 One site: 1–2 birds from late May into July but no further evidence of breeding.

#### Scotland, Mid

North-east Scotland 2003 18 pairs present, 17 bred and 15 fledged 31 young. North-east Scotland 2004 18 pairs bred, 13 of which fledged 26 young. Tayside 2003 45 pairs present, 38 bred and 29 fledged 60 young. Tayside 2004 57 pairs present, 40 bred and 27 fledged 56 young. Upper Forth 2003 12 pairs bred, nine of which fledged 23 young. Upper Forth 2004 14 pairs present, 12 bred and ten fledged 20 young.

#### Scotland, N & W

Argyll 2003 Seven pairs bred, six of which fledged nine young. Argyll 2004 Eight pairs present, seven bred and six fledged 12 young. Highland 2003 76 pairs present, 62 bred and 47 fledged 99 young. Highland 2004 81 pairs present, 74 bred and 54 fledged 110 young.

### Merlin *Falco columbarius*

2003 286–452 pairs. 2004 233–444 pairs. The table summarises the data received by the Panel, based largely on fieldwork by Raptor Study Groups. Data for Scotland are presented by Scottish Raptor Study Group area rather than by county. Productivity was higher in 2003, many nest failures in 2004 being attributed to the heavy rainfall which occurred on a few days in June. Since Merlin was added to the list of species considered by the Panel in 1996, the mean number of young fledged per occupied territory has been 1.86. The most recent UK population estimate is 1,330 pairs (Baker *et al.* 2006).

Merlin	2003				2004			
	Territories occupied by pairs	Territories known to have fledged young	Min. no. young fledged	Min. young/occupied territory	Territories occupied by pairs	Territories known to have fledged young	Min. no. young fledged	Min. young/occupied territory
England, SW	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
England, C	15	13	51	3.40	20	15	57	2.85
England, N	147	109	355	2.41	126	82	286	2.27
Wales	40	18	46	1.15	28	17	43	1.54
Scotland								
Dumfries & Galloway	9	2	8	0.89	9	8	13	1.44
Lothian & Borders	35	26	92	2.63	29	14	54	1.86
South Strathclyde	11	7	21	1.91	15	7	15	1.00
Central Scotland	0	0	0	—	1	0	0	0
North-east Scotland	52	39	142	2.73	48	28	80	1.67
Tayside	46	25	86	1.87	45	25	73	1.62
Argyll	5	2	2	0.40	11	1	1	0.09
Highland	54	24	81	1.50	67	19	53	0.79
Orkney	16	10	29	1.81	22	9	21	0.95
Shetland	5	2	7	1.40	7	4	9	1.29
Uists	9	4	8	0.89	—	—	—	—
Northern Ireland	7	5	11	1.57	14	4	9	0.64
TOTAL/MEAN	452	286	939	2.08	444	233	714	1.61

### Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

2003 212–864 pairs. 2004 220–916 pairs. The total numbers of pairs reported to the Panel in 2003 and 2004 were the highest ever, although still well short of the most recent estimate of 2,200 pairs for the British breeding population (Baker *et al.* 2006). However, the number of confirmed pairs for both years is lower than the ten-year average of 248. Depending on the county, the figures are based on a mix of best estimates of local recorders and the actual number of confirmed pairs. However, Hobby is such a difficult species to pin down that the numbers of confirmed pairs must represent a massive

Hobby (pairs)	2003		2004					
	Total Confirmed		Total Confirmed		2003		2004	
					Total Confirmed		Total Confirmed	
England, SW	147	55	147	49	Northamptonshire	1	1	0
Avon	10	5	10	4	Suffolk	40	14	9
Devon	20	18	10	10	England, C	103	61	111
Dorset	21	3	22	3	Derbyshire	36	29	24
Gloucestershire	8	5	11	8	Herefordshire	—	—	4
Hampshire	23	11	30	8	Leicestershire	13	6	11
Somerset	23	3	23	3	& Rutland			
Wiltshire	42	10	41	13	Nottinghamshire	9	8	14
England, SE	455	38	481	55	Shropshire	11	1	23
Bedfordshire	2	2	3	1	Staffordshire	3	1	—
Buckinghamshire	16	2	16	2	Warwickshire	28	13	35
Essex	33	14	44	44	Worcestershire	3	3	—
Greater London	1	0	1	0	England, N	21	9	20
Hertfordshire	49	3	50	1	Cheshire & Wirral	9	9	10
Kent	300	1	300	0	Gr. Manchester	1	0	1
Oxfordshire	4	4	5	5	Lancashire &	1	0	2
Surrey	21	3	27	2	N Merseyside			
Sussex	29	9	35	0	Northumberland	—	—	1
England, E	105	35	126	33	Yorkshire	10	0	6
Cambridgeshire	28	7	20	7	Wales	30	13	30
Lincolnshire	14	5	38	7	Scotland	3	1	1
Norfolk	22	8	20	10	TOTAL	864	212	916
								220



underestimate of the real population. It is difficult to determine trends from these figures; certainly there is no indication of an increase in number of pairs in the peripheral parts of the Hobby's range, including Wales and Scotland.

### Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

2003 479–902 pairs. 2004 509–821 pairs. The following summary information was received. For Scotland, parts of Wales and some English counties, this is comprehensive data for a non-random sample of monitored territories. Elsewhere, coverage varies and the productivity figures for all areas outside Scotland are minima. Data for Scotland are presented by Scottish Raptor Study Group area rather than by county. Peregrine Falcons can now be found breeding in most counties, only eastern and parts of inland southeast England still being vacant. Thefts from nests and deliberate disturbance are, however, still being reported from some areas, most notably northern England and Scotland. The national survey in 2002 estimated the UK population at 1,492 pairs (Banks *et al.* 2003). Further information is also available at [www.bto.org/survey/complete/peregrine.htm](http://www.bto.org/survey/complete/peregrine.htm)

Peregrine Falcon	2003				2004			
	Territories occupied by pairs	Territories known to have fledged young	Min. no. young fledged	Min. young/occupied territory	Territories occupied by pairs	Territories known to have fledged young	Min. no. young fledged	Min. young/occupied territory
England, SW	75	62	80	1.07	43	36	42	0.98
England, SE	34	22	39	1.15	36	23	50	1.39
England, C	68	44	89	1.31	46	28	70	1.52
England, N	172	78	154	0.90	153	110	242	1.58
Wales	99	64	125	1.26	113	75	152	1.35
Scotland								
Dumfries & Galloway	75	37	74	0.99	67	44	101	1.51
Lothian & Borders	59	30	76	1.29	54	28	68	1.26
South Strathclyde	28	15	34	1.21	26	18	39	1.50
Central Scotland	23	14	21	0.91	29	18	36	1.24
Northeast Scotland	59	25	56	0.95	57	36	81	1.42
Tayside	81	47	90	1.11	76	54	114	1.50
Argyll	24	12	18	0.75	23	13	24	1.04
Highland	30	17	45	1.50	28	19	44	1.57
Orkney	13	4	10	0.77	13	5	9	0.69
Uists	10	8	16	1.60	2	2	5	2.50
Northern Ireland	52	—	—	—	55	—	—	—
TOTAL/MEAN	902	479	927	1.09	821	509	1,077	1.41

### Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*

2003 Ten sites: 1–14 pairs. 2004 Ten sites: 0–15 pairs. All records of singing males, or any other evidence, are presented here. Some refer to one-day records or birds calling late in the season, but are included for completeness, given the enigmatic nature of this species. The regular site in Orkney was not used in 2003 or 2004, and there were no records from the Outer Hebrides or from the once-regular site of Insh Marshes in Highland. However, Shetland recorded the first confirmed breeding there in 2003.

#### England, SE

Sussex 2004 One site: one singing male for one date in early May.

#### England, E

Cambridgeshire 2003 One site: two singing males. For the first time since 1976, there was none at another site in this county. Cambridgeshire 2004 Two sites: (1) four singing males; (2) one singing male, at the site vacated in 2003. Norfolk 2004 One site: one singing male in May. Suffolk 2003 One site: one singing male in July was thought to be a passage bird.

#### England, N

Cheshire & Wirral 2003 One site: one singing male. Cheshire & Wirral 2004 One site: one singing male. Yorkshire 2003 One site: one male heard regularly in May and June, also September; two further singing males on single

dates. Yorkshire 2004 One site: two males singing in May, one for just one day.

Wales

Pembroke 2003 One site: one male singing from mid May into June. Pembroke 2004 One site: one male singing for one date in May.

Scotland, S

Clyde 2003 One site: one male heard on one date in July.

Scotland, N & W

Argyll 2003 Two sites: two singing males. Argyll 2004 Two sites: two singing males. Highland 2003 One site (not Insh Marshes): one male singing in June. Shetland 2003 One site: 1–2 pairs. Breeding was confirmed when one male heard singing in June (the third successive year at this location) was followed by sightings of an adult and juvenile between 6th August and 7th September. In addition, a second male was singing between 20th May and 17th July; see Maher *et al.* 2004. Shetland 2004 One site: one singing male at last year's breeding site on 22nd May was not heard again until 22nd June when two birds were calling, then one was heard until at least mid July.

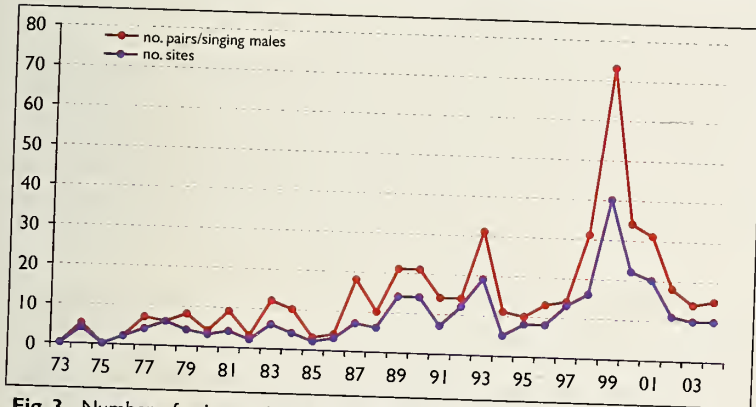


Fig. 3. Number of pairs or singing male Spotted Crakes *Porzana porzana* in the UK, 1973–2004, and the number of sites involved.

Ian Francis and David Stroud have commented as follows: 'According to RBBP records, in the UK around 10–30 pairs of Spotted Crakes probably nest annually in suitable wetlands, though most breeding-season records are simply of singing birds, with very few instances of confirmed breeding. The relationship

between singing and breeding activity is not clear, and indeed very little is known generally about the breeding biology of this skulking bird. However, recording standards are also poor, and many records are not submitted. An intensive search of locally published information and reserve records (Stroud & Francis in prep.) shows that most years more than twice the number of pairs are breeding than the official record suggests, and that totals also reflect observer effort. A more intensive national survey in 1999 (Gilbert 2002) recorded 73 singing males. We believe that in all years except 1999 the known totals are significant underestimates and published atlas maps provide an incomplete picture.

'Since the 1960s, numbers have apparently increased, though from 2002 onwards there seems to have been a sharp decline, with far fewer records across the UK and clear absences, not related to survey effort, at some known strongholds such as Insh Marshes. If there has been a genuine increase in recent decades, this would be contrary to general declines within Europe and similarly the recent sharp drop in numbers in the last two or three years does not appear to have been shared by some other European countries.

'The annual occupancy of sites and singing behaviour of potentially breeding birds are still little understood, and there appears to be considerable annual variation in numbers at well-recorded sites, probably related to weather during spring migration or breeding-site conditions. These factors are poorly known and greater intensity of monitoring is the highest research priority. However, the lack of submission of records by observers is a major factor hampering the protection of sites of importance to Spotted Crakes, and the process of rectifying this is time-consuming. Better information flows are urgently needed, and we urge all observers to submit records of this cryptic species to local recorders, and for these to be reported fully.'

## Corn Crane *Crex crex*

2003 832 singing males. 2004 1,067 singing males. The Panel received nest histories for ten broods on Coll in 2003, totalling 30 young (brood sizes ranged from one to nine), and for two broods on Islay in 2003, of five young each. Much of the data here are from the annual Corn Crane surveys co-ordinated by the RSPB, which cover the core areas of the British range (Inner and Outer Hebrides and Orkney).



O'Brien *et al.* (2006) gave a full account of the partial recovery of Corn Crakes in Britain during 1993–2004. The confirmed breeding record in Cambridgeshire represents the first successful breeding as a result of the reintroduction scheme being carried out by RSPB, Natural England and the Zoological Society of London.

England, SW

Avon 2003 One site: one singing male for one date in late May.

England, E

Cambridgeshire 2004 Two sites: one brood of three young and one singing male.

England, N

Greater Manchester 2003 One site: one singing male. Isle of Man 2003 Three sites: six singing males.

Scotland, Mid

Angus & Dundee 2004 One site: one singing male for one date only.

Scotland, N & W: mainland

Highland 2003 17 singing males. Highland 2004 12 singing males.

Scotland, N & W: Hebrides and Orkney (the 'core' area) Total numbers of singing males by island.

Argyll 2003 Total 343: Coll 90, Colonsay & Oronsay 32, Gigha 1, Iona 24, Islay 10, Mull 0, Tiree 184, Treshnish Isles 2. Argyll 2004 Total 505: Coll 134, Colonsay & Oronsay 46, Gigha 0, Iona 24, Islay 31, Mull 5, Tiree 260, Treshnish Isles 5. Highland 2003 Total 32: Canna 4, Eigg 0, Muck 5, Skye 23. Highland 2004 Total 40: Canna 4, Eigg 1, Muck 3, Skye 32. Orkney 2003 31. Orkney 2004 17. Outer Hebrides 2003 Total 395: Barra & Vatersay 68, Benbecula 30, Berneray 1, Harris 11, Lewis 105, North Uist 77, Pabbay & Mingulay 2, South Uist 101. Outer Hebrides 2004 Total 488: Barra & Vatersay 72, Benbecula 35, Berneray 3, Harris 24, Lewis 118, North Uist 112, Pabbay & Mingulay 5, South Uist 119.

Scotland, N & W: elsewhere

Shetland 2003 Four singing males. Shetland 2004 Two singing males.

Northern Ireland

2003 Two singing males.

The RSPB provided the following comments. 'Corn Crakes are counted annually within the core part of the species' range and every five years in the whole of the UK. The fourth full survey was undertaken in 2003, when 832 singing males were counted. This represents a considerable increase since previous full surveys in 1998 (589 males) and 1993 (480 males). Annual monitoring of the core area for



David Tipling/Windrush

149. Corn Crake *Crex crex*, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, June 1998.

Corn Crakes in Scotland (which holds more than 90% of the UK population) indicates that numbers increased in ten of the last 11 years, so that by 2004 there were more than twice the number in the same areas than in 1993.

'Between 1978 and 1993, the Corn Crane population declined by an average of more than 3% each year, but since 1993 it has been increasing by more than 5% per year. Schemes to enhance conditions for Corn Crakes were implemented during this period of increase. By 2003, more than 5,500 ha of land were under management to change the timing and method of hay and silage mowing or to provide suitable habitat in spring and autumn. The estimated improvement in Corn Crane breeding productivity from these actions has been sufficient to account for the observed change in population trend.'

## Common Crane *Grus grus*

2003 Two sites: two pairs. 2004 Three sites: five pairs.

England, E

Norfolk 2003 One site: two pairs bred rearing three young. Norfolk 2004 One site: four pairs bred, two were successful and reared two young each. At the end of the year there were 20 adult and four juvenile cranes in this area.

England, elsewhere

2003 One site: one bird summered. 2004 Two sites: (1) one pair bred and laid a clutch of two eggs, which hatched but were lost to foxes *Vulpes vulpes*, (2) one bird summered.

## Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

2003 One site: single male. 2004 One site: single male.

England, E

Norfolk 2003 & 2004 The solitary male present at Titchwell since 1993 remained throughout both years, and into 2005.

## Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

2003 60 sites: 1,353–1,374 pairs. 2004 66 sites: 1,359–1,386 pairs. The period under review saw another increase in the number of nesting colonies, up to 60 in 2003 and 66 in 2004. In 2003, Wales gained its first breeding Avocets, and two pairs bred at the same site in Gwent in 2004. However, apart from this there seems to be little sign of further spread away from the core range in England, which lies south and east of a line drawn between Morecambe Bay and the Humber. The number of confirmed breeding pairs also reached a new high in 2004, although there are signs of a levelling off in the numbers of pairs. The number of young fledged reported to the Panel each year is inconsistent, making comparisons between years difficult.

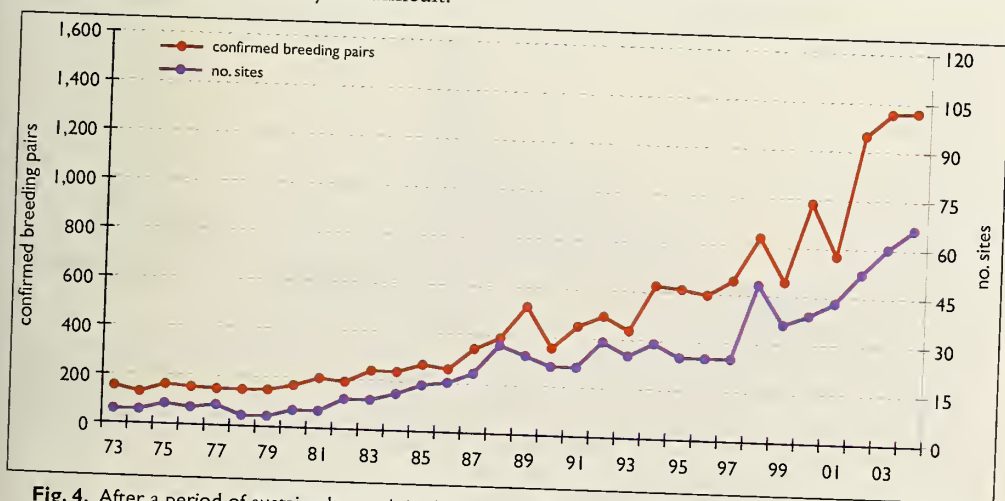


Fig. 4. After a period of sustained growth in the number of confirmed pairs from the late 1980s until 2002, it would appear that the population of breeding Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta* in the UK is stabilising. Perhaps low productivity is now checking the growth.



Avocet	2003			2004		
	No. sites	Confirmed pairs	Min. young fledged	No. sites	Confirmed pairs	Min. young fledged
England, SW						
Hampshire	1	2	1	2	5	9
England, SE						
Essex	8	158	44	7	151	24
Kent	10	328	60	4	200	?
Sussex	1	4	7	4	10	30
England, E						
Cambridgeshire	4	4	6	5	5	3
Lincolnshire	2	121	?	4	135	10
Norfolk	14	397	84	19	479	8
Suffolk	11	251	29	12	278	26
England, C						
Worcestershire	1	1	4	1	1	4
England, N						
Cheshire & Wirral	2	3	0	1	0	0
Lancashire & N Merseyside	2	13	18	3	24	16
Yorkshire	3	70	43	3	69	32
Wales						
Gwent	1	1	4	1	2	5
TOTAL	60	1,353	300	66	1,359	167

### Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*

2003 Six counties: 261 confirmed pairs; 210 monitored pairs fledged 156 young. 2004 Six counties: 294 confirmed pairs; 242 monitored pairs fledged 136 young. Monitoring by the RSPB, supported by English Nature (now Natural England), covers most of the population each year but is incomplete in the Brecklands of Norfolk and Suffolk. The figures given in the table below are for proved breeding pairs only. The total number of pairs confirmed breeding was 261 in 2003 and 294 in 2004, which compare with 272 in 2002. The detailed breakdown of the monitored pairs is shown in the table below. Despite some regional variation, the increase in the number of pairs since 1988 has continued.

Stone-curlew	2003		2004	
	Monitored pairs	Young fledged	Monitored pairs	Young fledged
England, SW				
Hampshire	24	9	20	5
Wiltshire	50	35	60	32
England, SE				
Two counties	8	9	13	9
England, E				
Norfolk	95	84	115	74
Suffolk	33	19	34	16
TOTAL	210	156	242	136

### Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

2003 458–689 pairs. 2004 458–690 pairs. These figures show an increase on 2002 data, but this may be a function of improved coverage and better submissions to the Panel. A nationwide survey of Little Ringed Plovers is being organised by the BTO for the 2007 breeding season. The following table shows number of pairs in each region; details of county totals are posted on the Panel's website. Baker *et al.* (2006) estimated the UK population to be 825–1,070 pairs.

Little Ringed Plover	2003		2004	
	Confirmed breeding	Max. total	Confirmed breeding	Max. total
England, SW	25	54	26	48
England, SE	87	151	88	145
England, E	55	65	49	79
England, C	116	144	86	132
England, N	120	206	89	150
Wales	46	50	113	125
Scotland, S	3	4	1	2
Scotland, Mid	6	14	6	9
Scotland, N & W	0	1	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>458</b>	<b>689</b>	<b>458</b>	<b>690</b>

### Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*

One report was received from outside the main Scottish range. The Panel seeks to record only those away from the core breeding range, which lies north of a line from the Firth of Clyde to the Firth of Tay and holds in the region of 510–750 pairs (Baker *et al.* 2006). A thorough search of once-suitable hilltops in Borders was conducted in both 2003 and 2004, but no Dotterels were located. The observer noted that the vegetation here was becoming more rank than previously, perhaps because of reduced grazing pressure and warmer summers, and was therefore less suitable for this species.

Scotland, S

Dumfries & Galloway 2003 Two birds on one hilltop on 6th July.

### Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

2003 One site: one single bird. 2004 None. Despite extensive searching of the regular site in both years, no birds were seen here, and the only record concerned a single bird present briefly at another site.

Scotland, N & W

Highland 2003 One site: one bird present in suitable habitat for two days in June.

### Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*

2003 One site: one single bird. 2004 Four sites: 1–4 pairs. After just a single bird in 2003, events in 2004 proved to be quite remarkable, with at least two widely separated breeding attempts, possibly the first



Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*

Richard Johnson



for the Western Palearctic. Given the circumstances leading up to the discovery of a freshly plumaged juvenile in North-east Scotland, it seems very likely that breeding did in fact occur at this site. Meanwhile, on the opposite side of Scotland, other birds appeared to be attempting to breed. In the light of these records, it is interesting to note a record from the Outer Hebrides in 2001 (which has not previously appeared in these reports) where a female in May was seen to feed and then disappear into long grass at the side of a loch.

Scotland, Mid

North-east Scotland 2003 One site: one bird present in mid July and one seen again on one date in August. North-east Scotland 2004 One site (same as 2003): one bird from 18th May then a pair from early June with display seen subsequently. In early July an adult and very fresh juvenile were seen together, remaining into October.

Scotland, N & W

Outer Hebrides 2004 Three sites, all on different islands: (1) pair displaying and holding territory 3rd–18th June; (2) two birds 5th June; (3) single male with Dunlin *C. alpina* on 25th June.

## Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*

2003 Four sites: 3–4 pairs. 2004 One site: one pair possibly bred.

Scotland, Mid

North-east Scotland 2003 One site: one adult in late May near a former breeding site.

Scotland, N & W

Highland 2003 Three sites: three pairs bred, each seen with one recently fledged young. Highland 2004 One site: pair present at one of 2003's breeding sites, but no further evidence of breeding.

## Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

2003 Three sites: 2–3 females bred. 2004 Six sites: three leks, 1–9 females bred. Confirmed nesting was reported in both 2003 and 2004 from Shetland and the Outer Hebrides respectively, with leks and hints of breeding also noted elsewhere. These are the first records of confirmed breeding since 1996, but there is little consistency in the location or number of breeding Ruffs in Britain.

England, E

Norfolk 2003 One site: two males and a female at an inland site in June. Suffolk 2004 One site: four displaying males and two females but did not stay and no suggestion of local breeding.

England, N

Lancashire & North Merseyside 2004 One site: a lek of up to 20 males and four females late April into May with copulation seen.

Scotland, N & W

Argyll 2004 One site: pair present but no further evidence of breeding. Outer Hebrides 2004 Three sites: one pair bred. (1) Female seen with chick in June; (2) two displaying males in May, but did not stay; (3) one flushed from possible breeding habitat in June, but not seen subsequently. Shetland 2003 Two sites: two pairs bred. (1) Female with two chicks seen in July; (2) female on nest of four eggs found in June but nest later abandoned.

## Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

2003 13 sites: at least 45–54 pairs. 2004 15 sites: 63–75 pairs. After a recent reduction in the number of sites, these years saw an increase in the number of both sites used and confirmed pairs. These records combine data for *L. l. limosa* in England and *L. l. islandica* in the Northern Isles and Outer Hebrides.

England, SE

Kent 2003 One site: three pairs bred. Kent 2004 One site: two pairs each laid three eggs; one was successful fledging two young.

England, E

Cambridgeshire 2003 Two sites: (1) 29 nests found and a further four pairs probably bred – 22 of the nests hatched chicks and at least 27 young fledged; (2) one pair bred. Cambridgeshire 2004 Two sites: (1) 42 pairs bred; (2) two pairs bred. Norfolk 2003 One site: three pairs bred, two of these fledged three young each. Norfolk 2004 One site: four pairs bred, two pairs were successful fledging six young. Suffolk 2003 & 2004 One site: single bird displaying in both years.

England, N

Lancashire & North Merseyside 2003 One site: two pairs bred, fledging 1–2 young. Lancashire & North Merseyside 2004 Two sites: (1) two pairs bred, hatching five and fledging three young in total; (2) one pair present but no further evidence. Yorkshire 2004 One site: two pairs fledged two young.

## Wales

Gwent 2003 One site: up to 35 birds displaying from April to June, breeding suspected.

## Scotland, S

Dumfries & Galloway 2004 One site: one pair present late May to July.

## Scotland, N &amp; W

Caithness 2004 One site: 1–2 pairs possibly bred. There were four birds in May with two remaining until 22nd June, but breeding was not confirmed. Orkney 2003 Two sites: 4–6 pairs bred with at least two fledging young. Orkney 2004 One site: five pairs bred and two pairs probably bred. Outer Hebrides 2003 One site: three pairs probably bred. Mating seen but any nesting attempts were not successful. Outer Hebrides 2004 Three sites: six pairs probably bred. Shetland 2003 Three sites: three pairs bred, two fledging three young in total. Shetland 2004 One site: four pairs bred, two pairs fledging a total of two young.

Black-tailed Godwit	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
No. sites	15	12	11	13	18	17	11	8	13	15
Confirmed pairs	28	34	42	38	45	39	52	47	45	63

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

The following record was received away from the species' stronghold in Orkney and Shetland. There is some indication that there has been a decline in both Orkney and Shetland but there are no quantitative data to substantiate this. The most recent population estimate is 530 pairs (Baker *et al.* 2006).

## Scotland, N &amp; W

Outer Hebrides 2004 A survey of an SPA in North Uist located five pairs, with two other pairs close by.

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

The following limited information was received, providing only a very small sample of the estimated Scottish breeding population of 720–1,480 pairs (Baker *et al.* 2006). Few reports give details of clutch or brood sizes. As stated in previous reports, the Panel would like to be able to monitor this species better and we encourage submission of all records from breeding habitat, in particular nest histories and notes of displaying birds or singing males.

## Scotland, N &amp; W

Argyll 2003 Records of birds in June but no indications of breeding. Caithness 2004 Records of birds at four possible breeding sites. Highland 2003 24 pairs reported of which ten were confirmed breeding. At one site, clutches of four, four and two translated to three, two and zero young respectively. Highland 2004 37 pairs reported of which 11 were confirmed breeding. Outer Hebrides 2003 Ten pairs reported, but none was proved breeding. Outer Hebrides 2004 24 reports of pairs, of which one was confirmed breeding. The population of the Lewis Peatlands SPA was estimated to be at least 150 pairs. Shetland 2003 Only one pair heard calling on one occasion.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

2003 One site: one pair. 2004 Two sites: 2–3 pairs. It is encouraging that birds are returning to the site used since 1999 and producing young in most years, two pairs being present in 2004. A second site was also occupied in 2004, making this one of the most productive years on record for Green Sandpiper.

## Scotland, N &amp; W

Highland 2003 One site: one bird displaying in April and a pair alarm-calling with young close by in June. Highland 2004 Two sites: (1) two pairs alarm-calling with young present; (2) one pair also alarming, on two dates.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

2003 Nine sites: 13–18 pairs. 2004 13 sites: 18–22 pairs. A paper analysing the historical records of Wood Sandpiper in Britain, up to 2004, was published earlier this year (Chisholm 2007). The Panel has since received two or three other extralimital records from the breeding season, which are reported here.

## England, N

2004 One site: a pair was seen singing and displaying in late May and into June, but there was no further evidence of breeding.

## Scotland, N &amp; W

Highland 2003 Eight sites: 13–16 pairs bred. Highland (including Caithness) 2004 12 sites: 18–21 pairs bred. Outer



Hebrides 2003 A displaying bird on 21st May only and a single bird in suitable habitat in late May could relate to the same individual; no further records were made, despite searching.

### Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

2003 Seven sites: 25–30 pairs. 2004 Seven sites: 31–36 pairs. The signs of a comeback mentioned in the last report seem to be continuing with further modest increases in the number of breeding males.

#### Scotland, N & W

Outer Hebrides 2003 Four sites: five pairs probably bred but no evidence of any young. Outer Hebrides 2004 Four sites: three pairs bred and five pairs probably bred. Shetland 2003 Three sites: (1) Fetlar: at least 19 breeding males (the highest since 1997) and at least 12 young fledged; (2)–(3) six pairs fledged at least five young. Shetland 2004 Three sites: (1) Fetlar: at least 19 breeding males; (2)–(3) another nine breeding males. A total of seven young fledged from the Shetland colonies.

### Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

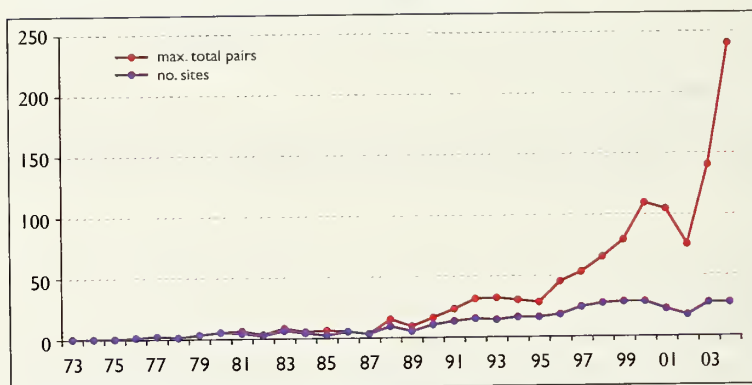


Fig. 5. The number of breeding Mediterranean Gulls *Larus melanocephalus* started to climb in the late 1990s but in 2003–04 reached record levels, with up to 241 pairs breeding in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

2003 27 sites: 122–140 pairs. 2004 26 sites: 183–241 pairs. Although the number of localities remained stable, the number of pairs reached a new high in 2004, after what appeared to be a downturn in numbers in 2001–02. The largest colony is at Langstone Harbour in Hampshire where a record total of 80 young was raised in 2004. The first

confirmed breeding reports from Greater Manchester (in 2003) and Cheshire & Wirral (in 2004) were received, while successful breeding in Northern Ireland in both years is notable.

#### England, SW

Dorset 2003 Two sites: four pairs bred and one pair probably bred. Dorset 2004 Two sites: six pairs probably bred. Hampshire 2003 Three sites: (1) Langstone Harbour: 33 pairs bred, raising 18 young – the low productivity is thought to have been caused by a shortage of earthworms in the dry weather; (2)–(3) three pairs bred and four pairs probably bred. Hampshire 2004 Three sites: (1) Langstone Harbour: 57 pairs bred, raising 80 young; (2)–(3) two pairs possibly bred.

#### England, SE

Bedfordshire 2003 One site: one single bird. Bedfordshire 2004 One site: one single bird. An adult first appeared at this Black-headed Gull *L. ridibundus* colony in 2002, but in 2004 it was noted on one date only. Essex 2003 Three sites: four pairs bred and two pairs probably bred. Essex 2004 One site: three pairs bred. Kent 2003 Three sites: 37 pairs bred and one pair possibly bred. Kent 2004 Four sites: (1) 26 pairs bred raising four young; (2)–(4) 48 pairs bred and one pair possibly bred. Sussex 2003 One site: at least 22 pairs bred, raising 22 young. Sussex 2004 Two sites: (1) 27 pairs bred, raising 36 young; (2) 40 pairs in April to mid May did not breed.

#### England, E

Lincolnshire 2003 At least two sites: three pairs possibly bred but display with Black-headed Gull also noted. Lincolnshire 2004 Two sites: one pair bred, seen feeding one chick, and one single bird. Norfolk 2003 Three sites: three pairs bred but failed and three pairs probably bred. Norfolk 2004 Three sites: five pairs bred, raising eight young, one pair probably bred. Suffolk 2003 Two sites: seven pairs bred raising at least seven young, and two pairs possibly bred. Suffolk 2004 One site: nine pairs bred, raising 8–10 young.

#### England, N

Cheshire & Wirral 2004 One site: two pairs bred raising six young and one pair possibly bred. Cumbria 2004 One site: one bird held territory. Greater Manchester 2003 One site: one pair bred, two young fledged. Greater Manchester 2004 One site: one pair of second-year birds bred but failed; five other birds also present. Lancashire & North Merseyside 2003 Two sites: six pairs bred, one pair probably bred. Lancashire & North Merseyside 2004 Two

sites: three pairs bred, two pairs possibly bred. **Northumberland 2003** One site: single bird present but did not breed.  
**Wales**  
**Anglesey 2004** One site: a second-summer was seen with nest material on 30th April and was also present on other dates.  
**Northern Ireland**  
**2003** Three sites: two pairs bred and one pair possibly bred. **2004** Three sites: one pair bred, one pair probably bred and two pairs possibly bred.

### Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*

**2003** Four sites: 1–2 pairs, plus 1–2 mixed pairs. **2004** Three sites: 1 pair plus 0–2 mixed pairs. Since the first reported nesting of a pair of Yellow-legged Gulls in Dorset in 1995, there has been little growth in the population, although mixed pairs, all with Lesser Black-backed Gulls *L. fuscus*, are now being reported more widely. The first in Northern Ireland is reported here. Only hybrid young have been raised since 2001.

England, SW

**Dorset 2003** Two sites: (1) pair bred but failed at egg stage; (2) two birds present early in year but not known whether breeding was attempted. **Dorset 2004** One site: pair bred but again failed at egg stage. **Hampshire 2003** One site: one mixed pair raised three young.

England, SE

**Bedfordshire 2003** One site: one mixed pair. **Bedfordshire 2004** One site: one mixed pair. In both instances a male was paired with a female Lesser Black-backed Gull, but no young were reported.

Northern Ireland

**Co. Fermanagh 2004** One site: one female in colony of Lesser Black-backed Gulls, but it is not known if it was paired.

### Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*

**2003** Min. 1,548 pairs. **2004** Min. 1,494 pairs. Summary information for each area is presented, based on a non-random sample rather than a complete survey. Numbers should be treated as minima. The same divisions are used as in previous reports of the Panel. The year 2003 was a very successful one for productivity with over 1,300 young fledged. Owing to flooding or disturbance, some colonies relocated but one of these relocations (in East Anglia) became the most successful site, with 233 pairs fledging

450–500 young, the largest number from a single colony since recording began, in 1969. In comparison, productivity at monitored sites was down in 2004 to around 0.41 chicks per pair, less than half of 2003's figure. Poor weather and gales in June, plus localised food shortages and high levels of predation at some sites, all contributed to the poor levels of success. Overall, colonies in Norfolk and south England fared worst while Scottish colonies were more productive. The table shows numbers of confirmed breeding pairs.

Little Tern	2003	2004
England, SW	40	56
England, SE	255	159
England, E	744	733
England, NE	196	196
England, NW	44	33
Wales	110	89
Scotland	159	228
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,548</b>	<b>1,494</b>

### Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*

**2003** Five sites: 101 pairs bred. **2004** Five sites: 88 pairs bred. Although the number of pairs in 2003 was the highest since 1989, the number of colonies continues to decline. Coquet Island was the largest colony in the UK, the total of 73 pairs being the highest there since 1972. The increase over the last four years is attributed to the creation of nesting terraces and nestboxes over recent years. However, the lack of nesting birds on the nearby Farne Islands means that 2003 was the first time that none have nested there since recording began. Furthermore, 2004 was the first year that Roseate Terns did not nest in Wales since seabird recording began there, in 1969. No birds nested in Cleveland, where one pair bred in 2002. In both years, though, there were records of small numbers prospecting at other sites.

England, S

**2003** One site: two pairs bred but nests abandoned. **2004** Two sites: three pairs bred but two nests were washed out at one site.

England, N

**Northumberland** One site, Coquet Island: 2003 70 pairs bred; 2004 73 pairs bred.



## Wales

Anglesey 2003 One site: two pairs bred but chicks died before fledging.

## Scotland, Mid

Fife 2003 One site: eight pairs fledged ten young. Fife 2004 One site: four pairs, with five young fledging from three nests.

## Northern Ireland

Co. Antrim 2003 One site: 19 pairs. Co. Antrim 2004 One site: eight pairs.

Roseate Tern	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
No. of sites	15	11	14	11	8	7	7	8	5	5
Confirmed pairs	72	66	54	50	61	52	58	73	101	88

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

2003 2,953 pairs. 2004 2,985 pairs. The Panel requests only county summaries for Barn Owl, asking recorders to provide a minimum figure for the number of pairs in their areas. The data provided thus range from detailed minima based on actual sightings, to broad-brush estimates where a large local population is poorly reported. In addition, nest details from Schedule 1 licence returns are received and

Barn Owl	2003	2004
England, SW	484	446
England, SE	427	318
England, E	365	783
England, C	290	187
England, N	731	575
Wales	243	180
Scotland, S	272	270
Scotland, Mid	91	103
Scotland, N & W	50	63
Northern Ireland	—	60
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,953</b>	<b>2,985</b>

in some areas they add to the local picture. Where there appears to be some duplication, a cautious approach is taken, using minimum figures. Looking at 2003 and 2004, the accumulated numbers of pairs are similar, and continue the trend towards an increasing population. Taking the higher total for each recording area in the two years gives a larger figure of 3,625, which is within the estimated UK population of 3,000–5,000 pairs (Baker *et al.* 2006). Given that the figures presented here represent a limited sample, it may be that the real population is now higher than this. The table shows the regional breakdown, giving details of number of pairs; details of county totals are posted on the Panel's website.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Common Kingfisher	2003	2004
England, SW	82	104
England, SE	270	284
England, E	137	173
England, C	145	145
England, N	333	261
Wales	90	94
Scotland, S	85	41
Scotland, Mid	18	17
Scotland, N & W	5	1
Northern Ireland	0	2
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1,165</b>	<b>1,122</b>

2003 1,165 pairs. 2004 1,122 pairs. Although the composition of records across the country was not entirely comparable between the two years, the total number of pairs in 2003 and 2004 were similar; the total for 2003 was the highest ever submitted to the Panel. The table shows the regional breakdown, giving details of number of pairs; details of county totals are posted on the Panel's website. Taking the higher total for each recording area in the two years gives a larger figure of 1,441, which is still well below the estimated UK population of 4,800–8,000 pairs (Baker *et al.* 2006) and suggests that this species is under-recorded in many areas.

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

2004 One site: one individual only.

## England, E

Lincolnshire 2004 One bird was present for several weeks in midsummer. This is the first record in the Panel's reports since 1999, when a male sang regularly from May to July on the Gloucestershire/Worcestershire border.

**Wryneck *Jynx torquilla***

**2003** Three sites: three singles. **2004** Three sites: three singles. A similar, rather subdued, showing in both years, with just one singing male reported in each year. It is encouraging that records are again being received from former breeding areas in Scotland, but all of the records presented here refer to one-day sightings only. The last confirmed breeding record was in 1999.

England, SE

Hertfordshire **2004** One site: one bird in May.

Scotland, Mid

North-east Scotland **2003** One site: one bird in suitable habitat in late June.

Scotland, N & W

Highland **2003** Two sites: two birds in May, one reported as singing. Highland **2004** Two sites: (1) one singing in May could not be relocated; (2) one in August close to a former breeding site.

**Wood Lark *Lullula arborea***

**2003** 1,058 pairs. **2004** 767 pairs. The following county totals were received, most of which are based on counts of singing males. Although full surveys were attempted in the Brecklands of Norfolk and Suffolk, and on the Suffolk coast, coverage in other areas was less complete and varied between years. Consequently, the apparent decline between 2003 and 2004 is probably an artefact of recording effort. The last national survey, in 1997, found 1,552 pairs; another full census was conducted in 2006 and will be reported here in due course. The table shows totals compiled from local surveys or nest studies. In addition, the following county estimates were received: Dorset 138 pairs (2003), Surrey 200 pairs (2003 and 2004) and Nottinghamshire 125 pairs (2004).

Wood Lark	2003 Total (confirmed)	2004 Total (confirmed)		2003 Total (confirmed)	2004 Total (confirmed)
England, SW	250 (54)	64 (3)	England, E	511 (342)	449 (31)
Devon	9	9	Lincolnshire	12 (10)	20 (2)
Dorset	54 (46)	45	Norfolk	211 (177)	147 (14)
Hampshire	186 (8)	10 (3)*	Suffolk	288 (155)	282 (15)
Wiltshire	1	—	England, C	55 (9)	21 (14)
England, SE	215 (51)	213 (65)	Nottinghamshire	34 (9)	20 (14)
Bedfordshire	1	—	Staffordshire	21	1*
Berkshire	33 (8)	35 (3)	England, N	27 (7)	20 (5)
Buckinghamshire	3	1	Yorkshire	27 (7)	20 (5)
Kent	3	2	TOTAL	1,058 (463)	767 (118)
Surrey	105 (6)	114 (8)			
Sussex	70 (37)	61 (54)			

\* Known to be incomplete.

**Shore Lark *Eremophila alpestris***

**2003** Two sites: 1–2 pairs. **2004** One site: 0–1 pair. The breeding record in 2003 is the first since 1977 and follows presence in seven out of the last eight years at this site. Although not included in the Panel's report for 2002, a pair was also present at this site in 2002. The two sites in 2003 are in different mountain ranges.

Scotland, N & W

Highland **2003** Two sites: (1) one pair bred, female seen with food in mid July and one fledged juvenile seen in early August; (2) male in suitable habitat in mid June. Highland **2004** One site: pair seen at the 2003 breeding site but no further evidence of breeding.

**Waxwing *Bombicilla garrulus***

**2004** One site: one individual in June.

Scotland, N & W

Highland **2004** An intriguing record was received of one feeding on apples in a west-coast garden between 9th and 11th June.



## Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*

2003 Two sites: 0–2 pairs. 2004 One site: 0–1 pair. Three enticing reports were received of single males in potential breeding habitat. All the reports concerned birds of the red-spotted race *L. s. svecica*, seen for one day only, but the low density of observers in Highland region reduces the likelihood of repeat sightings.

Scotland, S

Clyde 2003 One site: one singing male in mid June.

Scotland, N & W

Highland 2003 One site: one singing male in late May. Highland 2004 One site: one male seen in mid May, at a different location from the bird in 2003.

## Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

2003 24 sites: 12–32 pairs. 2004 20 sites: 9–23 pairs. The total number of pairs of Black Redstarts reported to the Panel in both 2003 and 2004 was substantially lower than the ten-year mean of 67. This is mainly due to a lack of reports from the main concentration in London, which held 18 pairs at 17 sites in 2002. Elsewhere, breeding Black Redstarts are found in urban environments from Lancashire southeast to Kent, and in industrial settings along the east coast from Great Yarmouth south to the Thames estuary. Most of the records of possible breeding refer to singing males, many of which are heard only for a short time. Proof of nesting in these urban/industrial settings is often difficult to achieve, and censusing such habitat adequately for this species is problematic.

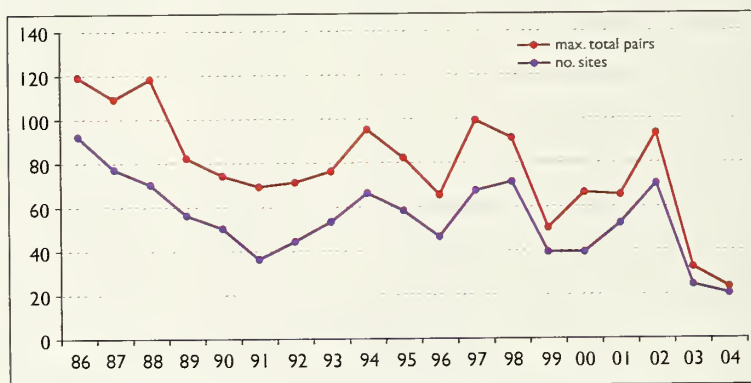


Fig. 6. The long-term trend of Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* numbers indicates a decline although the thorough survey of London in 2002 found significant numbers, which may contradict this apparent trend.

England, SE

Berkshire 2003 One site: one pair fledged two young and two other pairs probably bred.

Berkshire 2004 One site: two pairs possibly bred.

Buckinghamshire 2003 Three sites (in one town): three pairs possibly bred.

Buckinghamshire 2004 One site: one pair possibly bred.

Essex 2003 Two sites: three pairs possibly bred.

Essex 2004 Five sites: seven pairs bred.

Kent 2003 Four sites: four pairs bred, two

pairs probably bred and one pair possibly bred.

England, E

Cambridgeshire 2003 Three sites: one pair bred (raising two broods) and two pairs possibly bred.

Cambridgeshire 2004 Two sites (in one town): one pair probably bred and one pair possibly bred.

Lincolnshire 2003 Two sites: two pairs possibly bred.

Lincolnshire 2004 Two sites: one pair probably bred and one pair possibly bred.

Norfolk 2003 One site: two pairs fledged a total of eight young.

Suffolk 2003 Three sites: one pair bred and two pairs possibly bred.

Suffolk 2004 Five sites: two pairs bred, one pair probably bred and two pairs possibly bred.

England, C

Derbyshire 2003 One site: one pair bred.

Derbyshire 2004 One site: one pair possibly bred.

Nottinghamshire 2003 One site: one pair bred.

England, N

Greater Manchester 2004 One site: one pair probably bred.

Lancashire & North Merseyside 2003 Two sites: one pair probably bred and one pair possibly bred.

Yorkshire 2003 One site: one pair bred and one pair possibly bred.

Yorkshire 2004 One site: one pair probably bred.

## Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

**2003** Two sites: two single birds only. **2004** Seven sites: 2–7 pairs. Although 1–2 pairs bred in 2000–02, there were only two breeding-season records in 2003, in Yorkshire and Northern Ireland. In 2004, however, there were two definite breeding records, both in Scotland, as well as a third record which points to another pair nesting in Scotland or northeast England. Despite their conspicuous nature at other times of year, Fieldfares can be surprisingly elusive during the breeding season and breeding is not always easy to confirm, so the four records in England may also relate to breeding attempts.

England, E

**Lincolnshire 2004** Two sites: (1) single bird on 30th May; (2) single bird on 8th June.

England, C

**Derbyshire 2004** Two sites: (1) single bird apparently engaged in distraction display on 2nd June; (2) single bird seen on two dates in June.

England, N

**Yorkshire 2003** One site: single bird on 8th June.

Scotland, S

**Borders 2004** One site: a juvenile on 10th August at a coastal location seemed early for a Scandinavian migrant, but may not have fledged locally.

Scotland, Mid

**Fife 2004** One site: one pair bred, present 28th April to 26th May, and food-carrying and excited alarming seen until 22nd May. A search under licence could not locate a nest and no young were seen. The observer felt that the nesting attempt may have failed at the chick stage or the young may have died soon after fledging.

Scotland, N & W

**Orkney 2004** One site: one pair bred. Three recently fledged juveniles were seen on 14th June.

Northern Ireland

**Co. Down 2003** One bird in a garden on 28th June.

## Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

**2003** At least 12 sites: 5–17 pairs. **2004** At least nine sites: 2–15 pairs. All records received by the Panel are listed here, although some refer to one-day sightings only and may not relate to breeding birds. Nevertheless, the number of records remains low and probably does not reflect the true status of Redwings in their main breeding area in Highland Scotland.

England, SW

**Hampshire 2004** One site: single on 13th June.

England, C

**Derbyshire 2003** One site: one singing male on 17th May.

England, N

**Yorkshire 2003** One site: an adult with what was suspected to be a recently fledged juvenile was seen at a coastal location on 2nd August, but there had been no previous indication that Redwings were present here during the breeding season.

Scotland, Mid

**North-east Scotland 2003** One site: single bird on 20th July.

Scotland, N & W

**Highland 2003** Five extensive sites: five pairs bred and five other singing males. **Highland 2004** Five extensive sites: two pairs bred and nine pairs probably bred. **Orkney 2003** Two sites: two singing males in early May did not linger.

**Orkney 2004** One site: one singing male in early May and two further sightings in late June and early July. **Outer**

**Hebrides 2004** One site: one singing male for 13 days in late May. **Shetland 2003** Two sites: two singing males in early June did not linger, and no breeding is thought to have occurred on the islands. **Shetland 2004** One site: one singing male for five days in late May into early June.

## Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

**2003** 1,043 singing males. **2004** 1,137 singing males. The data presented here refer largely to counts of singing males and there were few reports of fledged young or single birds seen or trapped in the breeding season. Once again, these figures set new records for the numbers of Cetti's Warblers in the UK. Southwest England remains the stronghold with a consistent 53.5% of the total in both years. Records in a number of counties, including Dorset, Hampshire and Norfolk, suggested that the figures underestimate the true population.



Cetti's Warbler	2003 Total (confirmed)	2004 Total (confirmed)		2003 Total (confirmed)	2004 Total (confirmed)
England, SW	559 (0)	606 (18)	England, E	222 (4)	231 (0)
Avon	21	19	Cambridgeshire	0	1
Cornwall	9	10	Norfolk	165 (3)	176
Devon	67	65	Suffolk	57 (1)	54
Dorset	55	82	England, C	9 (1)	14 (10)
Gloucestershire	10	15 (3)	Leicestershire	1	2
Hampshire	185	186	Warwickshire	5	8 (6)
Isle of Wight	34	35	Worcestershire	3 (1)	4 (4)
Somerset	150	172 (13)	Wales	91 (1)	114 (0)
Wiltshire	28	22 (2)	Anglesey	9	8
England, SE	162 (8)	172 (12)	Brecon	2	1
Bedfordshire	0	1	Caernarfon	1	1
Berkshire	25 (2)	31 (3)	Carmarthen	17	—
Buckinghamshire	1	2	Glamorgan	9 (1)	11
Essex	16	23	Gower	25	38
Kent	73 (2)	96 (4)	Gwent	27	49
Oxfordshire	—	2	Pembroke	1	6
Sussex	47 (4)	17 (5)	TOTAL	1,043 (14)	1,137 (40)

### Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*

2003 Four sites: 0–4 pairs. 2004 Seven sites: 0–7 pairs. The last confirmed breeding record was in Sussex in 2000. Most records refer to singing males but note that in 2003 a nesting attempt was made in Kent.

#### England, SW

Devon 2003 One site: one singing male from 27th April to 1st May. Hampshire 2004 One site: one singing male on 4th July.

#### England, SE

Kent 2003 Two sites: (1) one pair probably bred (nest-building took place but the pair was thought not to have laid); (2) one singing male on 7th June. Kent 2004 Two sites: (1) one singing male on 14th July; (2) one singing male from 17th July to 3rd August.

#### England, E

Norfolk 2004 Two sites: (1) one singing male from 24th April to 5th June; (2) one singing male on 1st May. Suffolk 2004 One site: one singing male on 9th–10th June.

#### England, C

Warwickshire 2004 One site: one singing male on 21st May.

#### England, N

Lancashire & North Merseyside 2003 One site: one singing male on 9th–23rd May.

### Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*

2003 Six sites: 4–10 pairs. 2004 14 sites: 2–17 pairs. The sequence of poor years for this species was continued in 2003 and 2004; the apparent increase in sites in 2004 is due largely to singing Marsh Warblers occupying nine sites in Shetland alone. Kent is now the stronghold for this species in Britain, and the only county to report proved breeding.

#### England, SE

Essex 2004 One site: one pair probably bred. A male held territory and breeding is thought to have occurred. Kent 2003 Three sites: (1) four pairs bred, three fledging young, and one other singing male; (2)–(3) two separate singing males, each on a single date only. Kent 2004 One site: 2–4 pairs bred, with at least one pair successfully fledging young. Sussex 2004 One site: one pair possibly bred. A male was trapped on 20th June and juveniles were present on 13th August and 9th September, but may not have been locally bred.

#### England, E

Norfolk 2003 Two sites: (1) one pair probably bred at a site used in 1999, as there was a male in song on 5th–8th June and a second bird present on 10th–11th June; (2) one singing male for up to two weeks in June but no sign of a second bird or a nest. Norfolk 2004 One site: one singing male 6th–8th June. Suffolk 2004 One site: one pair probably bred. A singing male was present throughout most of June and another bird was also seen on several days.

England, C

Derbyshire 2003 One site: one singing male in suitable habitat on 12th June only.

Scotland, N & W

Shetland 2004 Nine sites: (1) two males and a female on 15th and 16th June. The males were singing and mating was observed, but the birds did not stay; (2) one singing male 5th–27th June; (3)–(9) at least seven singing males for 1–3 days in June.

### Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*

2003 Two sites: 0–2 pairs. 2004 Two sites: 0–2 pairs. Two males singing from suitable habitat were reported in each year, a typical showing.

England, SW

Devon 2004 One site: singing male on 3rd–4th June.

England, SE

Essex 2004 One site: singing male on 17th–30th May. Kent 2003 One site: singing male on 15th May.

England, N

Lancashire & North Merseyside 2003 One site: singing male on 21st–29th May.

### Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*

2003 1,225 pairs. 2004 1,496 pairs. The data presented here are known to be incomplete for some areas, most notably Hampshire, where the New Forest population was not counted. The higher number in 2004 reflects a local survey in the other parts of Hampshire. Three records of single birds in 2003 are also included as they hint at possible range expansions. The records in Bedfordshire and Norfolk were of single birds in the breeding season. The record in Lancashire refers to a male that was reported singing and carrying nest material in suitable habitat for two weeks in May, but was not recorded subsequently.

Dartford Warbler					
	2003	2004		2003	2004
England, SW	330	658	England, E	80	92
Devon	132	186	Norfolk	1	0
Dorset	82	118	Suffolk	79	92
Hampshire	29	282	England, N	1	0
Isle of Wight	7	2	Lancashire &	1	0
Somerset	80	70	N Merseyside		
England, SE	799	735	Wales	15	11
Bedfordshire	1	0	Denbigh	1	–
Berkshire	31	22	Glamorgan	2	1
Buckinghamshire	3	1	Gower	6	9
Kent	2	0	Pembroke	6	1
Surrey	653	610	TOTAL	1,225	1,496
Sussex	109	102			

### Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla*

2003 83 sites: 10–253 pairs. 2004 At least 50 sites: 5–283 pairs. The number of Firecrests reported each year varies with the effort allocated to searching for them but, even taking this into account, the totals presented here are much higher than ever reported before, the previous highest being 175 pairs in 1983. The latest population estimate is 80–250 males, based on results from the last national Atlas (Baker *et al.* 2006); it seems likely that this has now been exceeded. The breeding range is still largely restricted to southern England, with outlying birds in Wales. Cheshire & Wirral reported its first proved breeding record in 2003 but this was not repeated in 2004.

England, SW

Gloucestershire 2003 Three sites: two pairs probably bred and one pair possibly bred. Gloucestershire 2004 Two sites: one pair bred and one singing male. Hampshire 2003 45 sites: a survey revealed 109 singing males. Hampshire 2004 At least ten sites: a total of 109 singing males were again recorded. The number of sites in the main area of the New Forest was not specified in 2004. Somerset 2003 Three sites: four singing males. Somerset 2004 Three sites: three singing males. Wiltshire 2003 Three sites: one pair probably bred and two singing males. Wiltshire 2004 Five sites: seven pairs probably bred and five singing males.



## England, SE

Berkshire 2003 Six sites: four pairs bred, 19 pairs probably bred and a further 47 singing males. Berkshire 2004 Three pairs bred, 14 pairs probably bred and a further 56 singing males. The number of sites was not specified. Buckinghamshire 2003 Two sites: five pairs probably bred and one singing male. Buckinghamshire 2004 Two sites: five pairs possibly bred. Essex 2003 Two sites: two pairs probably bred. Essex 2004 Six sites: 31 pairs probably bred. Hertfordshire 2003 Two sites: two pairs possibly bred. Hertfordshire 2004 Three sites: two pairs probably bred and one pair possibly bred. Kent 2003 Four sites: one pair bred, one pair possibly bred and two singing males. Kent 2004 In the absence of a survey, there was only one breeding-season report, of a single bird in May. Surrey 2003 One site: two singing males. Surrey 2004 Five sites: five pairs possibly bred. Sussex 2003 Three sites: 25 singing males. Sussex 2004 Two sites: two pairs possibly bred and 12 singing males.

## England, E

Cambridgeshire 2003 One site: one singing male. Norfolk 2003 One extensive site: three pairs bred and seven singing males. Norfolk 2004 Seven sites: one pair bred, two pairs probably bred and 12 singing males. Suffolk 2003 Five sites: one pair bred, four pairs probably bred, two pairs possibly bred and three singing males. Suffolk 2004 One site: five singing males.

## England, C

Derbyshire 2004 One site: two singing males.

## England, N

Cheshire & Wirral 2003 One site: one pair bred, fledging three young; first county breeding record.

## Wales

Montgomery 2003 One site: one pair probably bred. Montgomery 2004 One site: two singing males. Radnor 2004 One site: one pair possibly bred.

**Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus***

2003 51 sites: at least 367–376 pairs. 2004 51 sites: 534–556 pairs. A national survey in 2002 estimated 504–559 pairs in Britain (Baker *et al.* 2006), the highest number since the Panel began monitoring Bearded Tits. The figures presented here for 2004 are close to the higher value, indicating that numbers have increased further in recent years.

## England, SW

Dorset 2003 Five sites: eight pairs. Dorset 2004 Three sites: four pairs. Hampshire 2003 Three sites: 7–8 pairs. Hampshire 2004 Three sites: 10–12 pairs. Somerset 2003 One site: five pairs fledged 20 young. Somerset 2004 Three sites: 18 pairs.

## England, SE

Essex 2003 Six sites: 15 pairs. Essex 2004 One site: 14 pairs. Hertfordshire 2003 One site: one pair bred but no young fledged. This represents the first attempted breeding in the county since 1973; none was recorded in 2004. Kent 2003 Six sites: 46 pairs. Kent 2004 11 sites: 63 pairs. Sussex 2003 Three sites: 13 pairs. Three pairs fledged 34 young at one site. Sussex 2004 Three sites: ten pairs.

## England, E

Cambridgeshire 2003 Two sites: two pairs possibly bred. Cambridgeshire 2004 One site: single female in July. Lincolnshire 2004 Three sites: seven pairs probably bred. Norfolk 2003 Ten sites: 47–53 pairs; no counts from two other occupied sites. Norfolk 2004 11 sites: 103–115 pairs. Suffolk 2003 Nine sites: 155 pairs. Suffolk 2004 Seven sites: 169 pairs.

## England, N

Cheshire & Wirral 2003 One site: one pair bred fledging 2–3 young. This is the first breeding record for the county. Cheshire & Wirral 2004 One site: one pair bred fledging three young. Lancashire & North Merseyside 2003 One site: 18 pairs of which 12 fledged 55 young. Lancashire & North Merseyside 2004 One site: 25 pairs fledged a minimum of 75 young. Yorkshire 2003 One site: 50 pairs. Yorkshire 2004 One site: 45 pairs.

## Scotland, Mid

Moray & Nairn 2003 One site: one pair fledged seven young. Moray & Nairn 2004 One site: two pairs. Perth & Kinross 2003 One site: no counts available. Perth & Kinross 2004 One site: at least 70 pairs estimated.

**Crested Tit *Lophophanes cristatus***

Only a limited amount of information was received by the Panel from the main range in Highland and Moray & Nairn. However, a record of a pair breeding to the southwest of the main range in 2003 is noteworthy. A minimum of four birds, including juveniles, were reported from near Acharacle in Moidart, some 50 km away from the nearest known breeding areas in the Great Glen.

## Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

2003 Nine sites: 5–11 pairs. 2004 Eight sites: 3–8 pairs. The Panel's dataset from 1973 to 2004 suggests that the population has stabilised at a maximum of 8–11 pairs since 2000, following a steep decline in the number of both pairs and sites since 1990. In 2003 and 2004, the Golden Oriole Group catalogued a total of 56 sites, all in East Anglia. In 2003, 32 of these were surveyed but birds were present at only nine. In 2004, 39 sites were surveyed and orioles found at eight. Based on these results, the total number of young fledged in each year was estimated by the Group as nine in 2003 and 3–11 in 2004. In addition, in southeast England, four singing birds were reported to the Panel in 2003. Although all were at inland sites, none stayed longer than one day.

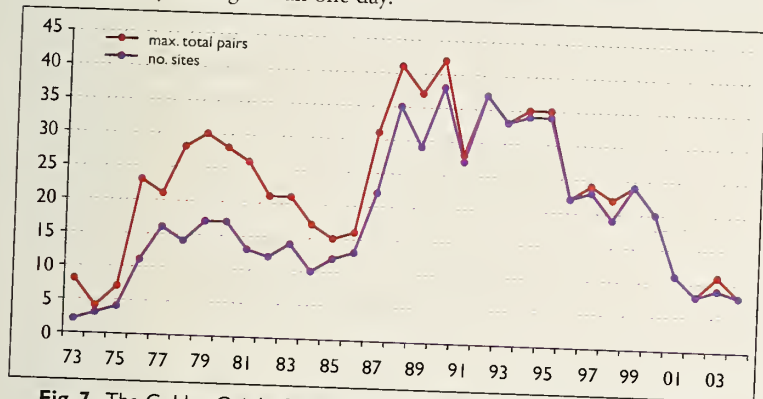


Fig. 7. The Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* population in England reached a peak in the late 1980s but has been declining ever since, numbers now being just 20% of what they were in 1990.

The Golden Oriole Group is to be commended for its continued monitoring efforts but, sadly, very few sites are now occupied following the peak years of the 1980s and 1990s. There is now a real prospect that this species will be lost as a regular breeding bird in Britain. In the last few decades, Golden Orioles have bred largely in plantations

of commercial poplar *Populus* cultivars in fenland. There is no longer a strong market for the timber, so some of the larger plantations have now gone and not been replanted. Although there are still suitable poplar plantations present in the area, they are not occupied by orioles, for reasons which are not clear.

England, E

Cambridgeshire 2003 Two sites: two pairs possibly bred. Norfolk 2003 Four sites: two pairs bred and at least four young fledged; three pairs possibly bred. Norfolk 2004 Four sites: one pair probably bred and three pairs possibly bred. Suffolk 2003 Three sites: three pairs bred and at least five young fledged; one pair probably bred. Suffolk 2004 Four sites: three pairs bred and at least three young fledged; one pair probably bred.

Golden Oriole	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Confirmed pairs	8	7	9	10	5	5	3	4	5	3
Max. total pairs	35	22	24	22	24	20	11	8	11	8
No. localities	34	22	23	19	24	20	11	8	9	8

## Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

2003 One site: 0–1 pair. 2004 Three sites: 1–3 pairs. The successful breeding in Shetland is the first confirmed breeding record since 1999, when a pair nested on the Scottish mainland, and is the second time that Red-backed Shrikes have nested in Shetland (Pennington *et al.* 2005).

Scotland, N & W

Highland 2003 One site: one singing male in June. Highland 2004 Two sites: two singing males on single dates in June. Shetland 2004 One site: one pair present in an overgrown garden of an uninhabited house from mid June to mid August fledged four young, one of which subsequently died.



## Red-billed Cough *Pyrhacorax pyrrhocorax*

The following incomplete data were received. The most recent UK population estimate is 429–497 pairs (Baker *et al.* 2006).

Red-billed Cough	2003			2004		
	Pairs	Young reared	Young per territorial pair	Pairs	Young reared	Young per territorial pair
Cornwall	1	3	3.00	1	4	4.00
Isle of Man	42	89	2.12	—	—	—
Anglesey	38	na	—	39	75	1.92
Caernarfon	81	na	—	83	144	1.73
Ceredigion	23	na	—	24	na	—
Denbigh & Flint	4	na	—	1	3	3.00
Glamorgan	2	0	0	1	0	0
Gower	1	3	3.00	2	4	2.00
Meirionnydd	16	na	—	14	na	—
Montgomery	1	na	—	0	—	—
Pembroke	64	120	1.88	50–52	83	1.66
Argyll: Colonsay & Oronsay	18	19	1.06	18	35	1.94
Argyll: Islay	13	na	—	34	73	2.15
Dumfries & Galloway	1	na	—	1	1	1.00
Antrim	1	2	2.00	1	2	2.00
TOTALS	306	236		269–271	424	

## European Serin *Serinus serinus*

2003 Three sites: 1–3 pairs. The confirmed breeding record in Norfolk was the first for that county, while another breeding attempt was reported elsewhere in the same county. Both are documented by Bloomfield (2004). It is speculated that the prolonged spells of warm and sunny weather in spring and summer 2003 contributed to this occurrence. This was also the first confirmed nesting reported to the Panel since 1996, when a pair bred in Kent.

England, SE

Essex 2003 One site: one singing male on 3rd August.

England, E

Norfolk 2003 Two sites: (1) pair bred at Holkham, fledging at least two young; (2) pair built nest and was seen copulating near Norwich, but no further evidence of breeding was recorded.

## Common Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*

2004 Four sites: 21 pairs. Common Redpoll was separated from Lesser Redpoll *C. cabaret* in 2001 (Knox *et al.* 2001). The closest regular-breeding populations of the former are in Norway. However, Common Redpolls occur in Highland, the Outer Hebrides and the Northern Isles in summer and occasionally breed, although this is the first time that this species has appeared in the Panel's reports. In 2004, numbers were not insignificant, with at least 19 pairs breeding on two island groups in the Outer Hebrides. Not all of the breeding birds were identified to subspecies, and although most are assumed to be of the race *flammea* ('Mealy Redpoll'), it is possible that some could be of the northwestern races *rostrata* and *islandica*.



Common Redpolls *Carduelis flammea*

Scotland, N &amp; W

Outer Hebrides 2004 Two islands: (1) at least 11 pairs bred; (2) at least eight pairs bred. Shetland 2004 Two sites: (1) pair bred fledging three young; (2) a pair was seen in July, and in August a flock of 11 included three juveniles.

### Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

2003 At least 332 pairs in England and Wales. 2004 At least 107 pairs in England and Wales. Data are presented for England and Wales only, but even these tell only a partial story, as some counties supplied minima based on confirmed nesting pairs, and others higher figures based on presence of birds in the spring. What is clear, however, is that Common Crossbills were more numerous in the early part of 2003, leading to widespread breeding records, but were scarcer after the middle of the year; and that this relative scarcity of crossbills continued into 2004. In Northern Ireland, there were widespread reports but no confirmed breeding in 2003; in contrast, there were just three reports of Common Crossbills in 2004. Few data were supplied for Scotland and Northumberland, where Common Crossbills can sometimes be numerous in coniferous forests and yet it is very difficult to assess numbers. The figures in the table are therefore likely to be gross underestimates for counties with large areas of conifer plantations, but for lowland counties the totals are more complete.

Common Crossbill	2003 Total (confirmed)	2004 Total (confirmed)		2003 Total (confirmed)	2004 Total (confirmed)
England, SW	29 (7)	10 (3)	Shropshire	30	10
Dorset	3	7	Staffordshire	4	0
Gloucestershire	6 (2)	0	England, N	43 (7)	33 (3)
Hampshire	4 (4)	2 (2)	Cleveland	4	0
Somerset	16 (1)	1 (1)	Cumbria	5 (4)	0
England, SE	99 (13)	19 (10)	Lancashire &	3 (3)	0
Bedfordshire	1	0	N Merseyside		
Berkshire	3 (3)	2	Northumberland	4	3 (3)
Hertfordshire	20	0	Yorkshire	27	30
Kent	52	0	Wales	22 (10)	25 (1)
Surrey	5 (1)	10 (3)	Anglesey	0	4
Sussex	18 (9)	7 (7)	Brecon	10 (4)	3 (1)
England, E	56 (2)	7 (2)	Caernarfon	0	4
Cambridgeshire	1	0	Ceredigion	1	3
Lincolnshire	12	5 (1)	Denbigh & Flint	3 (3)	0
Norfolk	3 (2)	0	Glamorgan	4	4
Suffolk	40	2 (1)	Gower	0	4
England, C	83 (2)	13 (0)	Gwent	3 (3)	3
Derbyshire	2	3	Meirionnydd	1	0
Leicestershire	47 (2)	0	TOTAL	332 (41)	107 (19)

### Scottish Crossbill *Loxia scotica*

The only information submitted was from two RSPB reserves in Highland and the data give little indication of the true status of this species.

Scotland, N &amp; W

Highland 2003 Two sites: two pairs probably bred. Highland 2004 Two sites: (1) five pairs probably bred; (2) two pairs possibly bred.

### Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*

As for the previous species, the only information submitted was from an RSPB reserve in Highland (Abernethy Forest) and the data give little indication of the true status of this species.

Scotland, N &amp; W

Highland 2003 One site: one pair probably bred. Highland 2004 One site: two pairs possibly bred.



## Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*

2003 Two sites: 0–2 pairs. 2004 One site: 0–1 pairs. Clearly the flurry of breeding activity in the early to mid 1990s was a false dawn. The last confirmed breeding was in 2000 and 2001 in Yorkshire, but 2002 was a blank year. The reports listed below all concern birds in potential breeding habitat.

Scotland, N & W

Highland 2003 Two sites: (1) one female trapped on 31st May; (2) one singing male on 10th June. Caithness 2004 One site: one singing male from 23rd June to 3rd July.

## Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*

2003 3–21 pairs. 2004 2–14 pairs. Though there is an improvement in the numbers reported to the Panel, the totals are but a fraction of the estimated UK population of 70–100 pairs, all in Scotland (Baker *et al.* 2006).

Scotland, Mid

North-east Scotland 2003 One pair bred and eight pairs possibly bred. North-east Scotland 2004 Two pairs bred, eight pairs probably bred and one pair possibly bred.

Scotland, N & W

Highland 2003 Two pairs bred, three pairs probably bred plus a further seven singing males. Highland 2004 One pair probably bred, one pair possibly bred plus one singing male.

## Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*

A full survey of breeding Cirl Buntings was carried out in 2003 and an estimated 697 territories were recorded, all in Devon (Wotton *et al.* 2004). This represents an increase of 54% since the last full survey in 1998. No data were submitted to the Panel for this species in 2004.

A reintroduction scheme began in 2006, when more than 70 Cirl Buntings were released in south Cornwall as part of an innovative project by the RSPB, Paignton Zoo, Natural England and the National Trust. This aims to restore sustainable populations of this species to its former haunts and the releases will continue until 2008.

## Acknowledgments

This report would not be possible without the willing co-operation of the county and regional recorders throughout the UK, as well as many specialist study groups, conservation organisations and numerous individuals. Important information for many species was supplied by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), English Nature (EN, now Natural England), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Countryside Commission for Wales (CCW), the BTO and the RSPB. We are especially grateful to the licensing officers responsible for Schedule 1 licences in 2003 and 2004: Jez Blackburn (BTO), John Ralston (SNH) and Gillian Bilsborough (CCW). The Panel gratefully acknowledges the efforts and role played by all contributors in the production of this report and thanks them most sincerely.

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## Looking back

### One hundred years ago:

'BIRDS STRUCK BY LIGHTNING. ON the afternoon of February 8th, 1906, about 2 p.m., the East of Norfolk was visited by a violent storm of snow and hail, and what was very unusual, it was accompanied for at least twenty minutes by incessant flashes of lightning. The storm came from the north-west, and the wind was registered as Force 4.

'This unusual atmospheric combination caused a stampede among the horde of Pink-footed Geese [*Anser brachyrhynchus*], estimated at nearly four thousand, which usually make the preserved salt-marshes of Holkham and Wells their headquarters. These birds, probably terrified by the noise of the thunder and half-blinded by the snow, flew about in all directions, exposing themselves to the electric fluid, with fatal results in several cases.

'I am informed that fifteen Pink-footed Geese and four White-fronted Geese [*A. albifrons*] were picked up by different people in the parishes of Bayfield, Holt, Kelling and Weybourne, which are four adjacent parishes at from ten to fourteen miles from Holkham.

'Seven of the Geese were lying more or less in a

line extending over three fields, and these had possibly all succumbed to the same flash. None of them showed much sign of injury; some had holes in their backs, one had a groove on the neck, another had been struck on the wings, and one or two are said to have exhibited no mark at all.

'During the same thunderstorm a Greater Black-backed Gull [*Larus marinus*] was struck at Corton in Suffolk, and was, I believe, seen by a woman to fall. Of the post-mortem appearance of this bird Mr. T. Southwell gives the following account in the "Norwich Naturalists' Transactions", VIII., p. 326:—

"Externally there was a track quite denuded of feathers about three-quarters of an inch wide, extending from the right carpal joint along the anterior margin of the wing, obliquely across the breast, and terminating on the left side of the abdomen; the skin was not broken, and there was no discoloration. On removing the skin there was no apparent trace of the passage of the electric current, and the abdominal wall was not perforated." J. H. GURNEY. (*Brit. Birds* 1: 29, June 1907)



# A survey of breeding Black-necked Grebes in the UK: 1973–2004

Brian Martin and Judith Smith



**ABSTRACT** Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* is a rare breeding species in Britain which favours shallow, eutrophic pools, preferably those which are undisturbed. The species first bred in Britain in 1904, and the number of breeding birds remained low for much of the twentieth century. Data from the Rare Breeding Birds Panel archives were analysed, and this paper provides a detailed regional summary of the ups and downs of Black-necked Grebes in the UK during the period 1973–2004. During that time, the population has increased, reflecting a wider expansion across northwest Europe, and the centre of gravity of the British population has shifted from southern Scotland to northern England; however, productivity remains generally low, and up to 40% of the population have bred at a single site. This paper discusses the possible factors underpinning the bird's continuing rarity and speculates on what the future may hold.

Black-necked Grebes *Podiceps nigricollis* breed in shallow, eutrophic waters, which typically have extensive fringe vegetation and often floating aquatic plants such as Amphibious Bistort *Persicaria amphibia*, Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata* and water-lilies *Nymphaea* (Gibbons *et al.* 1993). Although undisturbed lakes are ideal, a variety of sites in Britain have been colonised, including gravel-

pits, reservoirs and even former sludge-deposit grounds. The species will tolerate a limited amount of land-based disturbance but not water-based recreational activities (Boe 1992), and it is clear that this greatly reduces the number of potential breeding sites. A common factor at most, but not all, breeding sites is the presence of nesting Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus*, which provide an early warning of

potential danger. It is this combination of requirements that may well explain the rarity of Black-necked Grebe as a breeding species in Britain.

The bulk of the European population (estimated at between 37,000 and 142,000 breeding pairs) occurs from central Europe eastwards, with over 70% in the Ukraine and southern Russia (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). A northwesterly expansion from this core area seems to have begun in the later years of the nineteenth century and was believed by Kalela (1949) to have been caused by the drying out of lakes in the Caspian region, mainly as a result of climate change. Adamian & Klem (1999) also reported major losses from important breeding sites in Armenia following the lowering of water levels.

During this period of range expansion, breeding was first proved in Britain & Ireland in 1904, in Wales, followed by breeding records in England in 1918 and Scotland in 1930. In addition, an unusually large colony was discovered in Ireland in 1930, at Lough Funshinagh (Co. Roscommon), which may have contained an extraordinary 300 pairs in 1932 but is now extinct. With this one exception, however, population levels remained low during the early years of the twentieth century. A further period of colonisation occurred in the 1930s and early to mid 1940s, when breeding was first proved in Cheshire (Guest *et al.* 1992), Co. Durham

(Temperley 1951), and a number of pairs bred in Yorkshire (Mather 1986). It is doubtful, however, if the British population up to the period covered by this paper ever exceeded 15–20 breeding pairs, and it was frequently much lower. The period between 1950 and 1970 saw the population in retreat, with Black-necked Grebe barely retaining a foothold as a British breeding species. During 1968–72, Sharrock (1976) estimated the number of breeding pairs in Britain & Ireland at fewer than 20, with the population largely confined to a few sites in the Scottish lowlands.

### Methods

Following a decision by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP) to review the status of certain species, the authors were permitted access to all data held on Black-necked Grebes by the RBBP for the period 1973–2004. In addition, county avifaunas, county bird reports and breeding atlases have been consulted. These provided further information, in particular of fluctuations in numbers in the years prior to 1973.

It became apparent at an early stage that there was some inconsistency between records held by the Panel and its annual reports published in *BB*. Where this was evident, enquiries were made to individuals with local knowledge of the species and access to past records. These included County Recorders and specialist



150. Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*, Cavenham Pit, Suffolk, April 2007. A migrant bird, in full breeding plumage; Black-necked Grebes have never nested in Suffolk.

Bill Boston



groups monitoring regional Black-necked Grebe populations. In addition, it became clear that, in its early years, the RBBP was viewed with suspicion by some fieldworkers, who feared that breeding sites might be disclosed and were uncertain as to what use their records might be put. Consequently, this led to some data being withheld. We are satisfied that, following our enquiries, any inconsistencies have been largely resolved and previously unsubmitted breeding information released. We are confident that a more complete database of Black-necked Grebe breeding records has been achieved and that the following account accurately reflects the breeding population of Black-necked Grebes in the UK for the period 1973–2004.

### Regional summaries

Black-necked Grebe is a species targeted by egg-collectors, and unfortunately we have had to withhold the names of many sites. Only counties where either breeding has been proved or birds have been present long enough to suggest probable or possible breeding have been included in the text.

#### Southeast England (Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent)

Most records during 1973–99 were of migrants. The William Girling Reservoir in Greater London held 11 birds in both October 1998 and October 1999 (Musgrove *et al.* 2001). Since then, this water has become increasingly important for wintering birds, and a count of 27 in February 2005 was the highest in the UK for any site in the 2004/05 winter (Banks *et al.* 2006).

In Kent, a pair was seen at Dungeness in May and June 1984, and up to three juveniles were

there throughout August of that year, but breeding was not confirmed. There was nest-building at Lade Pits in 1988 but both birds had left by mid April, and the first confirmed breeding in Kent occurred in 2002, being repeated in 2003. In Essex, failed breeding attempts were reported in 1991, 1999 and 2000, but successful nesting finally occurred at one site in 2001 and 2002. Between 1990 and 2004, successful breeding took place at a site in Hertfordshire in five years, which included, remarkably, a pair of Great Crested Grebes *P. cristatus* hatching and fledging a Black-necked Grebe chick there in 2000. Latterly, this water has become the most important in the region, having eight breeding pairs in 2004, and it is hoped that the water company that owns the site will continue their positive management role, in conjunction with the local wildlife trust.

It is perhaps surprising that, given the number of gravel-pits in southeast England, Black-necked Grebe remains so scarce as a breeding bird. Recreational pressures may be a key factor preventing colonisation of this region.

#### Southwest England (Avon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Wiltshire)

The south-coast harbours and estuaries, from Langstone Harbour (Hampshire/West Sussex) to the Fal estuary complex in Cornwall, are important for Black-necked Grebes in winter. Double-figure counts have been regularly recorded as part of WeBS surveys, but it is often difficult to obtain accurate counts and numbers fluctuate, e.g. 33 on the Fal in December 1997, none there in the two following winters and then an average of 12 from 2000/01 to 2004/05. Langstone Harbour and Tor and Babbacombe

Bays (Devon) are also important but other coastal sites such as The Fleet (Dorset) and the Tamar (Cornwall/Devon) appear to be declining in importance.

Despite this, breeding has been recorded in only two southwest counties. In Avon, a pair bred in 1998, followed by possible breeding in 1999; and in Hamp-

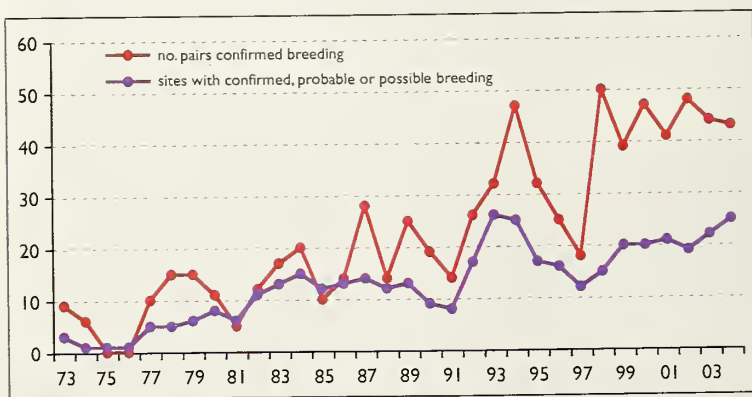


Fig. 1. The number of confirmed pairs of Black-necked Grebes *Podiceps nigricollis* breeding in the UK, and the number of sites at which confirmed breeding took place, 1973–2004.

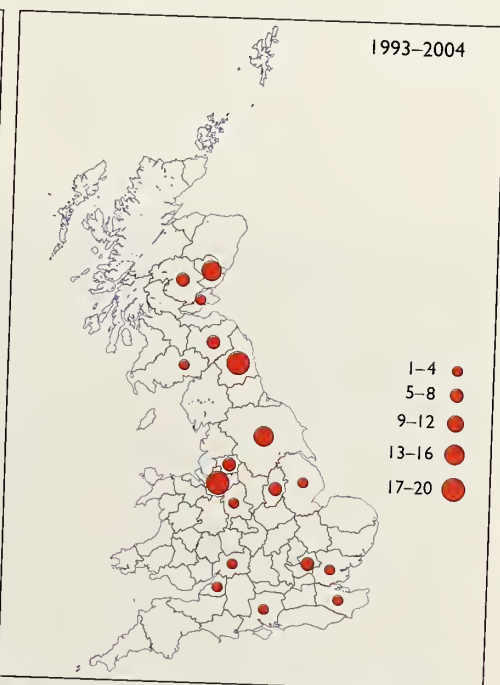
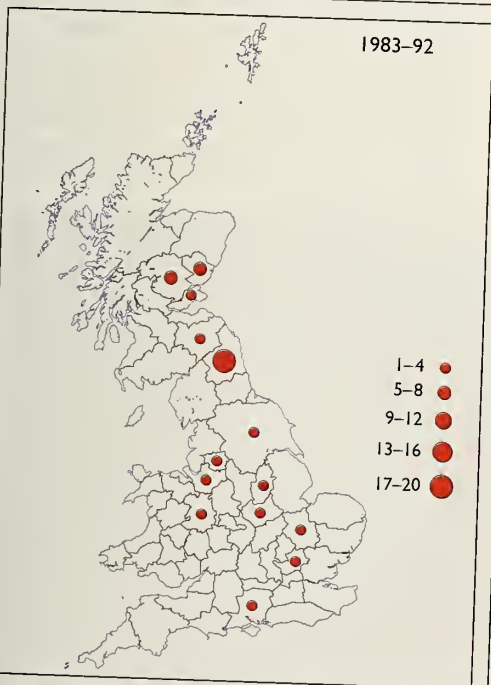
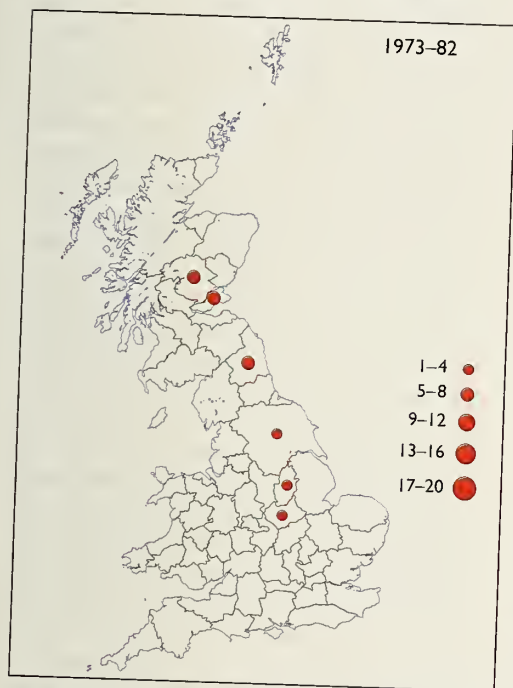
shire, a single pair bred successfully at a sewage-farm in 1987. At another site in that county, four pairs plus an extra male arrived in 1995, two pairs hatching young, and another pair nest-building. Although birds were present

intermittently in the following years, there was no confirmed breeding until 2004, when the single young did not survive.

In 1994, up to two birds were in Poole Harbour (Dorset) in May, and up to three remained on The Fleet from mid May to mid June. Cotswold Water Park straddles the border of Wiltshire and Gloucestershire and birds at this site have thus been recorded in both counties, but no breeding has occurred. In 2004, a pair was successful at another site in Gloucestershire and breeding was attempted close by.

*Eastern England (Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Suffolk)*

The Black-necked Grebe occurs only as a passage migrant in Suffolk and Norfolk, albeit increasingly so in the latter county. There has been one instance of successful breeding in Cambridgeshire, in 1989, and two unsuccessful attempts in 1992. In Lincolnshire, the first breeding in recent times took place in 1998, at two sites, following display in 1996, and was repeated in 1999, 2001 and 2003–04 at one of these. Birds have visited 15 waters in Northamptonshire since 1981 with display, copulation and nest-building noted in the county, but successful breeding has not been proved.



**Fig. 2.** The regional distribution and spread of breeding Black-necked Grebes *Podiceps nigricollis* in the UK. The data show the maximum number of pairs proved breeding, by county, in any year in three time periods, 1973–82, 1983–92, 1993–2004.



Central England (Derbyshire, Leicestershire & Rutland, Nottinghamshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire)

Confirmed breeding has occurred in all counties except Derbyshire and Worcestershire on at least one occasion during the period under review. In Leicestershire & Rutland, breeding has occurred at Rutland Water, with chicks seen in 1978, 1983, 1987 and 1988, but has not been confirmed since.

In Nottinghamshire, the first confirmed breeding was in 1979, when one pair fledged two young. Although two birds returned in 1980, breeding did not occur. A pair was successful in 1985 and breeding attempted in 1993, followed by success in four years since at four different sites. At one of these, in 2000, seven pairs hatched at least 16 chicks, of which up to ten fledged. In 2001, five pairs were thought to have bred at one site but only three chicks were seen, and there was probable breeding at a second water. In 2002, two pairs bred at one site, producing three or four young, but a family at another location was thought not to have been bred there. In both 2003 and 2004, there was successful breeding at one site by two pairs again, raising three juveniles in each year, and 1–2 other pairs either non-breeding or unsuccessful. Some disturbance was suspected at this site.

Some of the meres in Shropshire are in private ownership and, during 1987–89, confirmed breeding took place by one pair at an unidentified mere. In Staffordshire, breeding took place at Barton Gravel-pit in 1996. This site was later partly infilled and birds returning in

1997 moved between this and a nearby site that had also been partly destroyed, but no breeding occurred. In 2002, a pair failed to hatch a clutch laid late in the season at an exposed site with little vegetation. In 2004, a pair managed to fledge two young at an unprotected site, despite human disturbance. In Warwickshire, a pair was unsuccessful in 1984 and although birds visited three other sites in the period 1990–96, only in 1994 did a pair stay longer than a few days, but without any evidence of breeding. In 2000, an agitated adult was seen at a new site in May, but this record was not followed up.

In 1983, a pair frequented a reedbed in Derbyshire until it was flooded in early June. In 1994, two pairs displayed at a new gravel-pit site in that county, but left as the pit was pumped dry to make way for a link road to the M1 motorway. In Worcestershire, a pair was recorded at the same site in both 1986 and 1996 but water-skiing, sailing and fishing made the site unsuitable for breeding. The 1988 RBBP Report addenda stated that confirmed breeding took place at two central England localities in 1984 and at one in 1995, with presence at another water. Unfortunately, further details of these records could not be traced.

Northern England (Cheshire, Cleveland, Co. Durham, Greater Manchester, Northumberland, Yorkshire)

This region is undoubtedly the main breeding area in the UK, with three major clusters, in Cheshire, Northumberland and Yorkshire. At one point during the period under review, one



151. Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*, Northumberland, April 2006.

site in Northumberland became the most important in the country. It was established in 1977, when one pair bred, and numbers then increased steadily to reach 17 confirmed breeding pairs in 1989, when 28 young were seen. In 1990–91, there were approximately 16 pairs here, but productivity was poor. At this site, breeding Black-necked Grebes are dependent on Amphibious Bistort for nest-building, and cannot breed until this develops sufficiently to support the nest. In some years, plant growth is poor and therefore breeding suffers correspondingly, and at all times second broods are rare. American Mink *Mustela vison* (or possibly Otter *Lutra lutra*) caused wholesale desertion by 11 pairs in mid July 2000, leaving two pairs with young and one other pair. In 2001, seven pairs bred at this site but only four young were reared, and just one pair was present at another site. A return to better times was seen in 2002, when nine pairs hatched 12 young and just two nests failed, but again only four chicks fledged; at two other sites in 2002, single pairs fledged one and two young respectively. In 2003, a breeding attempt was thwarted by Common Coots *Fulica atra* at the main site and also at another site in the county.

From 1990, Black-necked Grebes began to colonise other Northumberland sites and, up to 1993, breeding was proved at three further sites and adult birds were seen at two more. From 1994, there was retrenchment to the major site, with expansion again from 1996 when two additional sites were used successfully, followed by a fourth new site used in 2000. In 2002, single pairs fledged one and two young respectively at this site and at one of the 1993 sites, which is now the pre-eminent water in the county, 5–6 pairs fledging young in both 2003 and 2004.

In Cheshire, there were records from eight sites during the breeding season in the period 1980–83, with probable breeding taking place at Nunsmere in 1982 and 1983, followed by successful breeding there in 1984. The introduction of water sports at this site in 1985 caused the birds to desert, and although they returned in 1986, they did not stay. Colonisation of what is now probably the most important site in the UK, Woolston Eyes SSSI, began in 1987, with successful breeding by one pair, progressing to eight broods from four pairs by 1991. Disaster struck in late 1991 when the owners drained the main breeding pool. Returning birds in spring

1992 found the site dry, and they scattered across northwest England, displaying at two other Cheshire sites but there was otherwise no evidence of breeding. Three displaced pairs arrived at a small site in Greater Manchester and all bred successfully, and there were also sightings at two sites in Lancashire, but no breeding. This event demonstrates the ability of this species to seek out and colonise newly suitable waters when necessary. During 1993–94, water levels were still too low at Woolston Eyes, but gradually the drainage ditches silted up and water returned. A pair bred at a nearby site in 1993, but this proved to be an isolated event. In 1995, two pairs bred successfully at Woolston Eyes, and as the former habitat returned, numbers grew to ten successful pairs in 1998, 15 pairs in 2001, a peak of 20 pairs in 2002, 11 pairs in 2003 and ten in 2004, with two and then one also successful at a second site in 2003 and 2004.

The propensity for this species to breed colonially was shown by the breeding history in Greater Manchester. As already noted, the first breeding here in 1992 was a direct result of dispersal from Woolston Eyes and two sites were occupied in 1993, when the water level at one of these was raised to a permanent summer level. Breeding occurred at both of these private and undisturbed sites in 1994 and 1996–98, and at the first site also in 1995. Subsequently, birds have withdrawn to Woolston Eyes, with only the second, larger, site regularly retaining up to five pairs, sometimes double-brooded. In 2004, this site achieved remarkable success when four pairs, all double-brooded, fledged 16 of 18 young hatched. Because the threat to Woolston Eyes has by no means gone away, it is felt that the nearby Greater Manchester sites should be protected in case of further problems.

In Yorkshire, there was successful breeding in 1982–84 at a site near Sheffield. From 1993, colonisation of the Lower Derwent Valley NNR began, five pairs nesting in the first year, increasing to 14 in 1994, 13 of which produced young; then nine pairs in 1995 hatched 15 young; 15 pairs in 1996 hatched 34 young; 11 pairs in 1997 hatched 11 young, and 4–6 pairs in 1998 on two adjoining sites produced 11 young. Fluctuating water levels in 1999–2000 then precluded breeding here, but suitable conditions returned in 2001, when three proven attempts produced nine young, at least seven of which fledged; up to four more pairs may have bred, but monitoring is extremely difficult at



this complex site. Three pairs returned in March 2002 but were not seen after 7th April. In 2000, a pair bred for the first time in recent years at Fairburn Ings RSPB reserve, and pairs were also present in 2001 and 2002. Since 2000, there has been confirmed breeding at three other sites and possible/probable breeding at two further sites.

Breeding records in Co. Durham in the late 1940s have never been repeated. In Cleveland, there was a promise of first breeding in 2004 but Common Coots harassed the pair before eggs could be laid.

*Scotland, South (Borders, Dumfries & Galloway, Lothians)*

The first confirmed breeding for the Borders region was in 1992, when a pair bred successfully at a site where a prospecting bird had been noted the previous June. This site was not occupied again until 1995, when a pair again bred successfully. Also in 1995, another site was colonised by a single pair, with breeding confirmed. From then until 2004, one or both sites were occupied annually, and at least one pair was successful in each year. Both were successful in 2001 and in 2002 six pairs bred at one site, but only four young were fledged. One of these sites is threatened because of the loss of emergent vegetation. In Dumfries & Galloway, a suspected breeding attempt in 1993 was thought to fail because of flooding of the nest. The only breeding-season records in the Lothians refer to migrants.

*Scotland, Mid (Angus, Fife, Perth & Kinross)*

In 1973, the year of the first RBBP report, the small British population of Black-necked Grebes was confined to this region, with a total of four pairs breeding at two sites in Fife and 12–14 pairs at the main site in Perthshire. The two principal sites, one in Fife, the other in Perthshire, continued to be pre-eminent throughout the remainder of the 1970s, although difficulties of access to the important Perthshire site meant that accurate data on population size and breeding success were difficult to obtain in some years. Nonetheless, it is clear that the population at this Perthshire site fell from the 1973 peak to an average of 3–4 pairs between 1977 and 1979.

The main Fife site showed less fluctuation in breeding numbers, but has suffered in recent years from flooding. One or two pairs bred in

most years to 2003, and an exceptional four pairs fledged eight young in 2001, although the birds were hampered by egg-collectors in 1990–91, and possibly by aggression from Little Grebes *Tachybaptus ruficollis* in 1995. The second site in that county, where a pair bred successfully in 1973, and which attracted seven pairs in 1977, from which four broods were reported, now appears to have been deserted because of disturbance from fishing boats. Four pairs bred there in 1978, fledging four young, while three pairs fledged six young in 1979. At a third site in Fife, breeding occurred in 1995 only, but the water is subject to disturbance from water-skiing.

In Perth & Kinross, the key site held 12–14 pairs in 1973, of which five were proved to breed; ten pairs in 1974 of which six bred; eight pairs in 1975 and ten pairs in 1976, when the outcomes were unknown. From 1977 to 1985, numbers there were reduced, but breeding by two pairs was proved in both 1981 and 1985. Numbers were back to nine pairs in 1986, but breeding details were not known. The following year, 1987, was a successful year, with seven pairs producing 12 young, but in 1988, although 11 pairs were present in April and six adults still there in late June, no breeding outcome was established. In 1989, 1991 and 1992, four, two and six pairs respectively were present but no outcome was known, while in 1990 two pairs were seen with two young and in 1993 five pairs had four young. A maximum of six pairs was present in July 1995. The last confirmed breeding record here was in 1996, when a pair with two young was seen in July; since then, there have been only passage records. The reason is thought to be a combination of predation by Otters, which arrived in the late 1990s, and competition from Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe and Common Coot, but research is needed to determine the extent of possible changes in water quality, macrophyte and invertebrate populations (M. V. Bell pers. comm.). At a second Perth & Kinross site, birds were present every year from 1984 to 1988 and probable breeding was recorded in two of those years. Two further sites also supported single pairs in 1987, each of which raised one chick. At a new site, four pairs bred in 1999 and six young were seen, of which at least three fledged. Two pairs bred here in 2000 but no young fledged. There was probable breeding by one pair of two in 2001.

In Angus, records are mostly from the

RSPB's Loch of Kinnordy reserve, a site with an abundance of Bogbean among which the grebes breed. The first record was in 1987, when a single pair hatched young from two breeding attempts; none survived and it was believed that they were predated by Pike *Esox lucius*. A pair raised two chicks in 1988, and in 1989 one young survived from each of two broods from one pair, while another adult was also seen to feed the young. Five pairs fledged nine young in 1990, and in subsequent years in this decade up to 11 pairs were present. Productivity has been low, with only one or two chicks fledging in some years. Numbers declined to two pairs in 1998 and just one pair in 1999–2001. Management work was carried out in 2001 to remove Branched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum* and silt. Following on from this, a Recovery Project, to address many problems which have led to the site losing much of its conservation interest, including Black-necked Grebes, is now in progress and expected to last until 2009. In 2001, a pair, probably from Kinnordy, arrived and bred successfully at a second site in Angus, but in 2002 two attempts there by a single pair failed. A pair bred at a third site in 2003.

#### Wales

No breeding occurred during the period of this survey in Wales, although migrants or non-breeding single birds have been seen in ten years in the period under review in Gwynedd, where birds winter off the coast. Migrants were also seen in Clwyd and Gwent in 1994.

#### Northern Ireland

Single adults have been recorded between March and September at Lough Beg or Lough Neagh in most years since 1994. In 1997, one displayed to a Slavonian Grebe *P. auritus* in May. There have been no proven breeding records since 1944, however (G. Gordon pers. comm.).

#### Discussion

The status of the Black-necked Grebe in Britain prior to the first proven breeding attempt in 1904 is unclear. Any suggestions of earlier nesting must be treated with caution, since confusion with Great Crested Grebe, formerly known as 'Eared Grebe' in some areas, cannot be ruled out. However, Brown & Grice (2005) stated that Pennant's (1771) description of birds in the fens, described as 'Lesser Crested Grebe', 'clearly identifies [them] as Black-necked Grebes.' Up to the early 1970s, the species was an annual, but rare, breeding bird with the stronghold of the small UK population centred in southern Scotland. Nesting in the rest of the UK occurred only occasionally during this time, and the pairs that were successful in England, for example in the 1940s, did not develop into an established population.

By 1973, breeding was confined to Scotland. The population changed little during the following years, but by the end of the 1970s the number of sites at which birds were reported began to increase slowly. From 1982, however, there was a significant rise in the number of



Ian Fisher

152. Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* with young chick, Northumberland, April 2006.



localities recording Black-necked Grebes in the breeding season, particularly in England, and by 1989 a maximum total of 34 pairs was recorded. It is clear that what was then happening in Britain was part of a much wider increase in northwest Europe, as a dramatic rise in the breeding population was noted in The Netherlands during the 1980s (Hustings 1991).

This improved showing continued into the 1990s (fig. 1). More waters in east, southeast and central England were visited during the breeding season, although breeding was only occasionally confirmed, suggesting that most birds were either on passage or found the sites unsuitable. The same applied to southwest England, where breeding has occurred on only a few occasions, in Hampshire, Gloucestershire and Avon. Throughout this period, Black-necked Grebes continued to breed on a number of lochs in south and mid Scotland, and the annual population ranged from eight to 17 pairs.

By 1998, birds were reported at 15 sites, which held 50 confirmed pairs, the highest breeding number ever recorded. Since then, there has been a levelling-off to 25 localities and 43 confirmed pairs in 2004. A significant change since the 1980s has been the shift of the population into northern England, with sites in Cheshire and Northumberland now of major importance for this species (fig. 2). A further site in Nottinghamshire held up to seven successful pairs, and another in the southeast of England has attracted a small but growing population.

Pleasing though the overall increase is, 40% of the confirmed pairs in 2002 were at just one site. In addition, productivity at some sites (notably in Scotland) is low. The reasons for this are unclear. Respondents to a questionnaire sent by the North-west England Black-necked Grebe Study Group to fieldworkers at current and former breeding waters blame mammalian predators such as American Mink and Stoat *M. erminea*, as well as Pike, for taking eggs and young in some years. Common Coots have been observed displaying aggressively to Black-necked Grebes, while at one Cheshire breeding colony Little Grebes have regularly attacked both adults and young (B. Martin pers. obs.). Red-eared Terapins *Trachemys scripta* have recently been reported at two sites in the north of England. Whether or not predation is a serious problem is unclear, but it may well be important in some years. There is no doubt that fluctuations in water levels, notably during incubation, and per-

sistent cold and wet weather do affect breeding success. At sites where nests are built on floating vegetation such as Amphibious Bistort, cold springs delay plant growth and breeding cannot then begin until late June or even early July. Finally, in the Cheshire and Greater Manchester area, four birds are known to have been killed by hitting overhead power lines in recent years. It is not known if this presents a significant threat to this nocturnal migrant.

Although information is limited, two long-term studies provide interesting data on the breeding success of Black-necked Grebes. Leible & Zach (1992) studied a large population of Black-necked Grebes (up to 172 pairs) in north-east Bavaria from 1972 to 1990. At one of the main sites, they found that the average number of hatchlings was 1.92 per pair ( $n = 751$  pairs), while the average number of fledged young was only 0.74. Fiala (1991), in a similar study in the Czech Republic, reported that 85.1% of clutches and 77.1% of eggs hatched successfully (mean clutch size from year to year varying from 2.80 to 3.44), although the average number of young fledged per breeding pair was only 1.01. It seems that the number of young fledged in many parts of Europe, the UK included, is low. Fiala (1991) reported the greatest losses occurring shortly after hatching and believed that chilling, disease and the inability of the adults to meet the food requirements of the young are the main causes. We can confirm the last factor from many years of monitoring the large Cheshire colony. There, broods of three occur regularly, but in 20 years no pair has ever fledged three young. At 10–14 days old, the brood is split between the adults, each of which generally copes successfully with the needs of only one chick (B. Martin pers. obs.).

Leible & Zach (1992) found that Black-necked Grebe colonies were always associated with Black-headed Gulls. For observers familiar with breeding sites in the UK, there has long been an impression that the presence of Black-headed Gulls is an important factor in nest-site selection by Black-necked Grebes. The responses to the questionnaire referred to above showed that, of the 14 regularly used sites, nine (64.3%) had thriving Black-headed Gull colonies, ranging from as little as 50–100 pairs up to 14,000 pairs at one site in southern Scotland (unpubl. data). Of the five sites where gulls were absent, one reported past breeding nearby and a few pairs holding territory occasionally

on site. Those findings suggest that the presence of Black-headed Gulls may not be an essential prerequisite for Black-necked Grebes but it is interesting that, of the five sites without breeding gulls, only one had a high level of chick survival. Fiala (1991) related the case of a Black-necked Grebe colony in central Europe which failed completely after attacks by Hooded Crows *Corvus cornix* and Magpies *Pica pica* during a year when Black-headed Gulls did not breed at the site.

Interestingly, concerns about poor breeding success have also been raised for Scotland's Slavonian Grebe population and the reasons for this species' poor productivity are unclear too. Much research has been carried out into the reasons for nest failure of Slavonian Grebes in Scotland, including day-and-night camera surveillance over two seasons. Otter, Pine Marten *Martes martes*, European Wildcat *Felis silvestris*, Badger *Meles meles*, American Mink, Stoat, Brown Rat *Rattus norvegicus* and domestic cat and dog were the mammals recorded visiting nests, but wave action, flooding and accidental displacement of eggs by the birds themselves also led to clutch loss. The presence of crows and Pike was found to be circumstantially important in clutch and chick survival respectively. The numbers and distribution of small fish, themselves dependent on midge (Chironomidae and Ceratopogonidae) abundance, may also be important and may affect the choice of breeding loch: it is unclear why some apparently suitable lochs are ignored. Human disturbance, particularly by bank- and boat-fishing, is an important factor, as it is with Black-necked Grebe. Good weather conditions in the first two weeks after hatching is also helpful, so that chicks do not die of hypothermia; stable water levels throughout the breeding cycle were also shown to be important (Benn 2003; Summers *et al.* in prep.).

Much remains unknown about Britain's summer population of Black-necked Grebes. For example, where do they winter? A small population has wintered for many years in harbours and estuaries on the south coast, but the numbers there would not account for all of Britain's breeding birds. It may well be that many winter further south, perhaps in the Mediterranean. During the 1970s and early 1980s, up to 3,900 Black-necked Grebes wintered on saline lagoons at Formentera (Balearic Islands) (Mayol 1984), while in the late 1990s over 15,000 wintered in France, mainly in the

south (Rocamora & Yeatman-Berthelot 1999), though ringing recoveries suggest that wintering birds in France principally come from The Netherlands, Denmark and central and eastern Europe (Dubois *et al.* 2000). It is possible that some British birds move to France, although there is no evidence to confirm this.

### Hope for the future

One of the most positive developments in recent years has been the formation, under the auspices of the RSPB, of two specialist Black-necked Grebe Study Groups, one in Scotland, the other in northwest England. Now, previously isolated fieldworkers are exchanging information, while studies have been set up that will hopefully increase knowledge of, for example, habitat requirements, aquatic invertebrate populations, predation levels and water chemistry, about which little is known at most sites. The data obtained should prove helpful in the management of existing Black-necked Grebe breeding sites, while encouraging the development of new sites to attract this fine grebe.

Although many breeding sites in the UK experience low productivity, there are a few where breeding success is consistently high. There is scope for a study into the reasons for this. Consideration also needs to be given, at a national level, to the control of alien predators.

The British Black-necked Grebe breeding population has in the past decade reached its highest known level, but the species remains a rare breeding bird. Since birds prefer to nest on undisturbed waters, it is likely to remain scarce, but there is no reason why further increases should not continue if disturbance is kept to a minimum and new, carefully managed, sites become available. The Black-necked Grebe is protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and the majority of breeding waters are Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Even so, some are known to be vulnerable to development or recreational pressures. Black-necked Grebe is more numerous as a breeding species in other parts of Europe, and since no British sites support numbers even approaching 1% of the European total, none would qualify for the higher level of Special Protection Area status.

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#### Endnote

Since the completion of this paper, the Rare Breeding Birds Panel has adopted the Black-necked Grebe as its new logo; a fitting tribute to this charismatic bird.



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153. Black-necked Grebes *Podiceps nigricollis*, Warrington, Cheshire & Wirral, April 2006.

# Conservation research news

Compiled by Mark Bolton, Steven Ewing and Sabine Schmitt



## Birds as bat food?

The unexpected finding of bird feathers in the faeces of Europe's largest bat, the Greater (or Giant) Noctule *Nyctalus lasiopterus*, in Italy (Dondini & Vergari 2000), caused great controversy. Some scientists criticised the interpretation that the bats feed on nocturnally migrating passerines, suggesting instead that they occasionally, probably mistakenly, ingest airborne feathers.

However, a more recent study (Popa-Lisseanu *et al.* 2007) has lent substantial weight to the hypothesis that the 46-cm-wingspan Greater Noctule adapts its diet in autumn to exploit nocturnal passerine migrants passing through the Mediterranean region. Stable isotope analysis of blood samples from Greater Noctule bats from March to October showed that the signatures of  $^{15}\text{N}$  and  $^{13}\text{C}$  changed seasonally in precisely the way predicted if the bats were shifting from a diet composed entirely of insects in summer to a diet composed predominantly of birds in autumn. In spring, when the numbers of migrants are lower, the isotopic signatures indicated a mixed diet of insects and

birds. It seems most probable that migrating passerines are caught, and probably devoured, on the wing. Noctule bats are considered entirely aerial-pursuit feeders and the suggestion by this study that their summer diet is composed entirely of insects argues against the hypothesis that the bats are catching birds roosting in tree holes, since such prey should be abundant in the breeding season too. The authors suggest that the distribution of this rare bat, which is restricted to the Mediterranean, is probably linked to its dependence on concentrations of migrating passerines in a similar way to Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae*. They also pose the question as to whether other aerial-hawking bat species have a similar taste for an avian diet.

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Popa-Lisseanu, A. G., Delgado-Huertas, A., Forero, M. G., Rodriguez, A., Arlettaz, R., & Ibanez, C. 2007. Bat's conquest of a formidable foraging niche: the myriads of nocturnally migrating songbirds. *PLoS ONE* 2(2): e205. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0000205

## Climate change and the decline of a marginal population of Grey Jay

Recent changes in the biogeographic ranges of plants and animals are consistent with the predicted effects of global climate change. Such changes ultimately reflect the cumulative effects of the decline and extinction of local breeding populations at the margins of a species' distribution, perhaps balanced by extensions elsewhere. Until recently, no studies had explored the mechanisms responsible for the decline of peripheral populations, but a recent paper (Waite & Strickland 2006) reports an unusual mechanism of decline in a Grey Jay *Perisoreus*

*canadensis* population at the southernmost edge of its distribution in Ontario, Canada.

Grey Jays are year-round residents of boreal and subalpine forests in North America. They begin breeding early in the season, often during February, when temperatures remain well below zero. At this time, as throughout the winter, they rely on food that was stored during the previous summer and autumn. Using data collated during a 25-year period, Waite & Strickland showed that population size, measured by territory occupancy, declined, probably as a result of



a decrease in breeding productivity (clutch size and number of fledglings). The authors looked at the effects of seasonal variation in temperature on breeding success, and demonstrated that the mean temperature of the previous October and November had some influence on subsequent clutch size and number of nestlings. They also showed that the proportion of mated pairs producing at least one nestling tended to be low following warm autumns.

To explain these patterns, the authors came up with 'the hoard-rot hypothesis'. Grey Jays are unusual corvids because, instead of seeds, they hoard perishable items such as berries, arthropods and carrion for consumption during the winter. Traditionally, these food items were frozen during cold autumns and thus preserved throughout the winter, but increasing autumn temperatures may mean that stored prey items

are rotting before they can be consumed. Declines in productivity are likely to be a result of inadequate food supplies during the early breeding season, although the authors also acknowledge that part of the decline in reproductive success may also be due to a larger proportion of juveniles attempting to breed.

The hoard-rot hypothesis is an interesting idea, which awaits confirmation through experimentation, but the study does highlight the benefits of examining peripheral populations to identify the demographic effects of global climate change. This approach would probably facilitate a greater understanding of the repercussions of climate change on birds in the Palearctic region.

Waite, T.A., & Strickland, D. 2006. Climate change and the demographic demise of a hoarding bird living on the edge. *Proc. Roy. Soc. Lond. B* 273: 2809–2813.

## An increase in Snake Pipefish: potential implications for seabird breeding success

Seabird breeding success depends on the availability of nutrient-rich and suitable prey. Many seabirds in the North Sea feed on sandeels *Ammodytes marinus* during the breeding season, but sandeel stocks around the large seabird colonies of northern Britain have been low for several years. This seems to be the main reason for the low breeding success that many seabird species have suffered recently and which gives cause for concern for the future of these colonies.

Mike Harris and his colleagues have recently demonstrated a dramatic, though unexplained, increase in the abundance of Snake Pipefish *Entelurus aequoreus* since 2003 and an expansion of that species' range northwards to Spitzbergen and the Barents Sea. They analysed data from scientific trawl and plankton surveys, monitoring programmes on seabird diet, and records from divers and fishermen. Prior to 2002, Snake Pipefish were rare in the seas around Britain and elsewhere in the northeast Atlantic. For example, fisheries research trawls carried out during 1925–2005 in the west of Scotland and the northern North Sea recorded Snake Pipefish only twice up to 1997 and then only in single figures until 2003, when a staggering 217 individuals were taken. Similar numbers were recorded in 2004 and 2005. This coincides with observations in seabird colonies

where, prior to 2004, Snake Pipefish had never been recorded in diet samples. However, in 2004 and 2005, pipefish were reported as dietary items from seabird colonies over a broad area from northeast England and northwest Scotland north to northern Norway, Iceland and the Faeroe Islands.

Although information on the nutritive value of Snake Pipefish is lacking, their rigid, bony structure makes them difficult for young seabirds to swallow and there are several records of chicks starving to death, sometimes among piles of uneaten pipefish, or choking to death trying to swallow them. The authors conclude that the population explosion of Snake Pipefish in the northeast Atlantic is unprecedented and that this increased abundance is likely to affect the food-web dynamics in the region. Unfortunately, at a time when sandeel stocks continue to be low and when an alternative source of food would be welcome, it seems unlikely that Snake Pipefish will provide a useful alternative prey for seabirds during the breeding season.

Harris, M.P., Beare, D., Toresen, R., Nøttestad, L., Kloppmann, M., Dörner, H., Peach, K., Rushton, D.R.A., Foster-Smith, J., Wanless, S. 2007. A major increase in snake pipefish (*Entelurus aequoreus*) in northern European seas since 2003: potential implications for seabird breeding success. *Marine Biology* 151(3): 973–983.

# Notes

All Notes submitted to *British Birds* are subject to independent review, either by the Notes Panel or by the BB Editorial Board. Those considered appropriate for BB will be published either here or on our website ([www.britishbirds.co.uk](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk)) subject to the availability of space.

## Slavonian Grebe breeding with Great Crested Grebe

In spring 2006, at a site in central England, a Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus* paired with a Great Crested Grebe *P. cristatus*, laid eggs, and produced two young, which unfortunately did not survive. The Slavonian Grebe had arrived at the site, a disused clay-pit approximately 0.6 ha in extent, on 29th April and, about two weeks later, a Great Crested Grebe appeared too. Breeding Little Grebes were already present when the Slavonian Grebe arrived, but no attempt to pair with them was observed. On 10th June, the Slavonian and Great Crested Grebes were photographed displaying together (plate 154). During the following week or so they built a nest at the edge of a small reedbed. On 25th June, one egg was seen in the nest; on 6th July, four eggs were visible during a change-over of incubation duties (which were shared by the two birds); and on 23rd July, one small chick was seen by the nest (plate 155). A second chick hatched on 25th July, but sadly both chicks were predated by a Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* the following day. The grebes continued to incubate the remaining eggs, but these did not hatch. Both birds remained at the site until 6th November.

Although Slavonian Grebe has been reported breeding with Black-necked Grebe *P. nigricollis* in

Scotland (Dennis 1973), this appears to be the first documented interbreeding of Slavonian and Great Crested Grebe, and the first breeding attempt by a Slavonian Grebe in England (see Brown & Grice 2005). In mainland western Europe, small numbers of Slavonian Grebes breed in Germany but otherwise there is no population south or west of Scandinavia (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). The Scottish breeding population lies well to the north of central England and in 2006 numbered only 39 pairs (S. Benn pers. comm.). Fjeldså (2004) stated that hybridisation in grebes is rare, but also that late-season hybridisation may be a result of active and adaptive mate choice by individuals with limited alternatives, rather than of species misidentification.

### Acknowledgments

I thank Stuart Benn (RSPB) and Ian Francis (RBBP) for comments, and the local County Recorder for additional comments.

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Stephen Toon

154 & 155. Slavonian *Podiceps auritus* and Great Crested Grebes *P. cristatus*, with hybrid chick in plate 155 (right), central England, June–July 2006.

Stephen J. Toon

c/o Rare Breeding Birds Panel, The Old Orchard, Grange Road, North Berwick, East Lothian EH39 4QT



## Puffin with exceptionally heavy tick infestation

David Playle



156. Puffin *Fratercula arctica* infested with ticks, Mull, Argyll, May 2006.

David Playle

39 Whitehouse Road, Claverham, Bristol BS49 4LJ

**EDITORIAL COMMENT** Mike Harris commented as follows: 'Although it is impossible to be sure without examining specimens, the ticks appear to be engorged *Ixodes uriae*, a common species that parasitises a wide range of seabirds in both the northern and the southern hemisphere. In Britain, the commonest hosts are Common Guillemot *Uria aalge* and Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*. This tick has three life stages: larva, nymph and adult. All stages, except adult male, engorge with blood during a single attachment to the avian host that lasts 4–8 days. The larger, older stages tend to be found on the head and neck, where birds cannot preen. Perhaps surprising, there is nothing to suggest that this Puffin has attempted to scratch the ticks off. After feeding, the tick detaches, enters the soil or a crack in the rocks and either moults to the next stage before overwintering and feeding again the next year, or in the case of the adult female, searches out a male, is fertilised, lays eggs and dies. The life-cycle typically lasts three years.

'This Puffin has a deep, well-rounded beak with at least two well-developed grooves on the upper mandible. This suggests that it is at least 4–5 years old and, given that the observation was made in May, will probably have been incubating, likely on the nearby Treshnish Isles. Typically, Puffins pick up ticks within the nesting burrow at this time of year. Our work on the Isle of May suggests that the incidence is low (c. 10%) and, since the numbers of ticks involved are usually small, and all but engorged females are easily overlooked, even when the bird is in the hand, it is only rarely that infested birds are noticed. Close examination of David Playle's photographs suggests that this bird had at least 110 feeding ticks. The larger ticks will be females, the smaller ones nymphs. Despite having handled many thousands, and looked at tens of thousands, of Puffins over 40 years, this is by far the most extreme case of infestation by ticks that I have come across.

'Doubtless this Puffin will have lost a substantial quantity of blood and it may also have had an allergic reaction to so many 'bites'. As if this was not enough, these ticks carry a range of pathogens including viruses and a neurotropic form of the Lyme disease agent *Borrelia garinii*. The proximity of the ticks may increase the likelihood of pathogen transmission between ticks (a process termed 'co-feeding transmission'). There would seem plenty of scope for this here! Although alive when photographed, the bird was obviously distressed and its chances of survival (and those of the ticks) must have been very low.'

In May 2006, near Bunessan in the southwest part of Mull, Argyll, my daughter and I spotted a Puffin *Fratercula arctica* 'floundering ashore' through the surf. It soon became apparent that it was 'unwell' and behaving abnormally. A closer investigation revealed that the bird's head was a mass of ticks, and the accompanying photograph was taken. We placed it higher up the beach, in the cover of large boulders, where it made a determined effort to seek shelter. Later that day we looked for it again but could not find it.

## Eurasian Sparrowhawk attacking Soprano Pipistrelle bat

The Bedfordshire Bat Group (BBG) monitors an exceptionally large roost of Soprano Pipistrelles *Pipistrellus pygmaeus* on a private wooded estate in east Bedfordshire. The roosting site is under the roof of a small building, which in the evening is lit by spotlights, making observation of the departing bats easy. The bats emerge from two exit holes in the southeast corner, then fly straight into the trees. Counts of bats departing from the roost are made by the BBG on a fortnightly basis throughout the summer; in most years, up to 600 bats use this roost in the height of summer.

On 7th May 2003, SN & DN recorded a male Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* deliberately hunting bats coming out of the roost. This bird made at least seven attacks within 30 minutes on bats emerging from the exit hole, and caught at least two. These were taken to an oak *Quercus* tree immediately in front of the

exit hole, where they were 'plucked' and eaten. Although a male Sparrowhawk was seen around the roost several times that year and again in 2004, hunting behaviour was not witnessed again, although larger numbers of observers may have deterred the hawk.

On 19th July 2005, Jude Hirstwood and DO were waiting for the first bats to leave the roost when DO noticed a male Sparrowhawk land on a prominent snag nearby. At 21.16 hrs the first Soprano Pipistrelle left the roost site, whereupon the Sparrowhawk immediately went after it at speed. Although they did not see the Sparrowhawk catch the bat, it was suspected that it did, and the bird did not return to its perch. On 20th July 2005, JH and DN were stationed close to the exit hole, where they not only saw a male Sparrowhawk sally out to make an unsuccessful attack, but also observed it land at the entrance to the roost and peer inside.

Sarah & Derek Niemann

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Dave Odell

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**EDITORIAL COMMENT** Ian Newton has commented: 'These records reveal when and how captures are made and suggest pre-planning on the part of the Sparrowhawk.'

## Reed Warbler apparently using willow-bark pieces in nest construction

On 29th June 2006, by a lake on Westhay Moor, Somerset, I saw a pair of Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* fly to perch on a dead branch of a willow *Salix fragilis* bush. One of the birds, presumably the female, tore at the bark with its bill, collecting several 'peelings', and the two birds then flew to a dense part of a *Phragmites* bed in the water. Shortly afterwards, the pair returned to the same branch and resumed peeling; this was repeated on at least four further occasions. I assumed that the Reed Warblers were engaged in nest construction, although the nest was not visible and the

reedbed was inaccessible. At times, snatches of song were uttered by the male bird.

Bark strips are not normally used as components in the nests of Reed Warblers. Campbell & Ferguson-Lees (1972) listed grasses, reed-flowers and moss fragments, with a lining comprising reed-flowers, grass and occasional feathers, wool or hair.

### Reference

Campbell, B., & Ferguson-Lees, J. 1972. *A Field Guide to Birds' Nests*. Constable, London.

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# Reviews

## DAVID KOSTER: ARTIST, PRINTMAKER & NATURALIST

Edited by Christine Johnson.

Wildside Books, Great  
Malvern, 2005. 116 pages;  
numerous colour images.  
ISBN 978-0-9549754-0-1.

Hardback, £35.00.

Available from Wildside Books,  
Rectory House, 26 Priory Road,  
Great Malvern, Worcestershire,  
WR14 3DR.

David Koster's name may not figure highly in the pantheon of bird artists and illustrators familiar to birdwatchers but, in the wider field of wildlife art, his name would be

near the top of any list of leading practitioners. He was already established when he became a founder member of the Society of Wildlife Artists over 40 years ago, and his large, colourful prints have been a feature of the Society's annual exhibitions. Birds have figured prominently in his contributions, so full of life and character. Although stemming from hours of fieldwork and sketching from life, the results are far from the precise, stilted, illustrative tradition. He is both painter and printmaker, and it is in the latter that his greatest originality is revealed. He has made lithographs and screen prints, etchings, lino- and woodcuts, where he works with refreshing freedom and

brilliant colour, without ever losing the jizz of his subject.

This is the first book to showcase David's work and it does so superbly. He writes engagingly of his early life and how he became drawn to the natural world, of his National Service spent in Malaya, his years in the Highlands and seabird studies on Skomer. The numerous illustrations cover a wide range of subjects, from fishes to insects, and mammals to flowers, but with birds predominating. There is a wealth of colour and vitality in this handsomely presented collection of sketches, studies, prints and paintings.

Robert Gillmor

## THE SELBORNE PIONEER: GILBERT WHITE AS NATURALIST AND SCIENTIST – A RE-EXAMINATION

By Ted Dadswell, Centaur  
Press, London, 2006. 256 pages.  
ISBN 978-0-900001-56-7.

Paperback, £14.95.

When the hardback version of *The Selborne Pioneer* first appeared a few years ago, I skimmed through it in a book shop and decided that, as intrigued as I was with the subject matter, I could afford to wait for the paperback version. Now that I have read the book, I realise that trying to skim through it was a mistake. To be appreciated, this is a book that needs time and concentration. It needs to be read carefully.

Gilbert White is celebrated primarily as the author of one popular and enduring book, *The Natural History of Selborne*. Michael Wood, the historian and broadcaster, wrote for a recent BBC4 documentary that, 'in its quiet and unobtrusive way, White's deceptively simple account of the comings and goings of the wildlife and animals in Selborne began the shift towards our modern ecolog-

ical sensibility'. Ted Dadswell would not argue with this sentiment, but in *The Selborne Pioneer* it is the 'simple' impression of Gilbert White that he sets out to dispel. On the contrary, he claims, White should be recognised as a serious scientist who can rightfully take his place in the ranks of the great natural historians spanning the centuries from John Ray, through Charles Darwin to Nobel prize-winners such as Konrad Lorenz and Niko Tinbergen.

To build his case, Dadswell points to White's application of scientific method – his use of controls, his persistent collection of data and quantitative information and his support for collaborative investigation – but above all, he identifies White's concentration on animal behaviour as being particularly significant. This was the Linnaean age, when most naturalists were focusing on taxonomy, identification and listing, usually with the aid of collected specimens. In contrast, White spent his time outdoors, watching, listening and wondering about the 'life and conversation' of living creatures. It is this focus on behaviour that differentiates White from his contemporaries and makes him truly the Selborne pioneer.

Dadswell points to numerous behavioural discoveries made by White yet, curiously, the discovery for which he is perhaps best known was a taxonomic and identification advance. White confirmed that three *Phylloscopus* warblers breed regularly in Great Britain. His evidence was based in part on comparison of collected specimens, but at least as important were his behavioural observations. By watching the birds in the field, White was able to describe differences in their actions and particularly differences in their songs. Through field observation, he made many other behavioural discoveries, including the migration of Ring Ouzels *Turdus torquatus*, courtship feeding in birds and aerial mating by Common Swifts *Apus apus*. Indeed, Dadswell goes so far as to suggest that White's interest in animal behaviour, and particularly his views on adaptability in the face of environmental change, places him in the vanguard of post-creationist thinking. This is a bold claim to make of an eighteenth-century cleric, working almost 100 years in advance of Darwin. I found this the most intriguing part of the book and was a little disappointed to find it being introduced two-thirds of the way through the text.

Whether or not these arguments are persuasive is for the reader to decide. Fans of White will not need convincing of his contribution and will be more than happy to see credit given where credit is due. That said, as a fan myself, I was left with just a small nagging doubt. Dadswell has interpreted White's

record and his 'hints' in the light of 250 years of advances in scientific thinking; this allows plenty of opportunity for post-rationalisation. Despite this reservation, this is an intriguing book, well researched and full of supporting facts. I learnt a great deal about Gilbert White and about the history of natural

history and this made it well worth the read. Furthermore, with a quarter of its 256 pages devoted to appendices, notes and references, it also provides a very handy entry point to lots of other sources of related information.

John Eyre

**SILENT FIELDS:  
THE LONG DECLINE OF  
A NATION'S WILDLIFE**

By Roger Lovegrove.  
Oxford University Press,  
Oxford, 2007. 384 pages.  
ISBN 978-0-19-852071-9.  
Hardback, £25.00.

As soon as I opened this book, my mind slipped back to my days as a fledgling pre-teen birdwatcher in North Wales in the late 1950s, when on a favourite walk through heavily kept woodland I would come across the gamekeeper's shed with its row of avian corpses swinging from the gable end. This grisly array featured mainly the usual suspects – Carrion Crows *Corvus corone*, Magpies *Pica pica* and the then-scarce Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, but once or twice I was shocked to see a Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* among them. The sad lifelessness of the limp bundles of feathers – such a contrast to the vitality of the birds I loved finding and watching in life in the fields and woods – will always stay in my memory.

The author of this thoroughly researched yet extremely accessible, well-written and much-needed book will be well known to many readers as Director of RSPB Wales until his retirement in 1997. Throughout it, he skilfully teases out the complex nature of the relationship between humans and the birds and mammals that have been seen as competitors – or 'vermin'. Its title, which I suspect was the publisher's rather than the author's choice, is misleading, since it is likely to remind one above all of Rachel Carson's famous book *Silent Spring*, but apart from brief

mentions, does not deal with the damage to wildlife wrought by pesticides. The subtitle, too, is something of a misnomer, as many of the species described, such as Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* and Magpie, are (presently at least) far from being in decline.

But these are minor quibbles about what is a landmark title. Its core represents more than six years of diligent work on the part of the author, aided by many others, in combing through the 'untapped treasure trove of past records of ... victims of parish bounty payments.' The geographical scope is largely and understandably restricted to England and Wales, where parish records provide detailed information on numbers of species killed. At least half the book deals with birds, the rest with mammals, and there are a few mentions of reptiles.

Chapter 1 deals briefly with the mammals eliminated early by humans from the British list. Chapter 2 provides a fascinating examination of the social background to persecution; chapter 3 is a brief illustrated survey of methods of control, including a whole battery of 'fiendish and ingenious devices', from a seventeenth-century suggestion for using a captive bird, bird lime and string to ensnare Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* to far more effective spring traps for Common Buzzards and Red Kites *Milvus milvus*. Chapter 4 deals with the history of killing in Scotland, where most of the less complete information on the huge scale of persecution comes from the relatively few surviving records of sporting estates, such as Glengarry where, for example, no fewer than

275 Salmon-tailed Gleds (Red Kites) were despatched by the keepers in just four years from 1837 to 1840. Chapter 5 discusses the impact of the Tudor Vermin Acts, while chapter 6 contains 20 sections on 23 species of birds, from Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* to Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*. I was surprised to see how assiduously two of my favourite river birds – Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* and Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* (long believed to be male and female respectively of the same species!) – were persecuted on some Scottish estates. And I had not appreciated before the amount of damage Green Woodpeckers *Picus viridis* still wreak on church steeples in southeast England. Chapter 7 is a similar chapter detailing 11 species of mammals, while chapter 8 examines differences in local patterns of persecution in England and Wales. Chapter 9 provides welcome relief from the chronicle of slaughter by looking at the 'return of the natives', while chapter 10 very briefly addresses the subject of 'vermin' control, both legal and illegal, in today's Britain. Chapter 11 is a brief but incisive coda on where to go next, which should give plenty of food for thought to conservationists, birdwatchers and those charged with game management. The first of two appendices, occupying 47 pages, is a detailed tabular list of vermin payments arranged under county headings, while the second is a list of names (vernacular and scientific) of species mentioned in the text. This is followed by 25 pages of references and a detailed index.

Jonathan Elphick



# News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

## 100 years of British Birds

For one month only, *BB* itself is the top story for N&C. In June 1907, publisher Harry Witherby printed the very first issue of *British Birds*. One hundred years later it remains the journal of ornithological record; indeed, BBC Radio Four's website describes *BB* as 'arguably the most influential journal about British birds'.

If you heard the Radio Four *Nature* programme on 7th May, you will have been treated to a half-hour history of the journal, with contributions from Stephen Moss, Mark Cocker, Ian Wallace and past and present editors James

Ferguson-Lees and Roger Redington. Among the accounts highlighted in the programme were unusual behaviour, colonisations – and scandal. The 1966 Note 'Turnstones feeding on human corpse' (*Brit. Birds* 59: 307) is a classic of understated observation, while the 1957 'First for Britain' account of Collared Doves *Streptopelia decaocto* in Norfolk (*Brit. Birds* 50: 239–246) seems incredible from a distance of 50 years when these birds are present in most suburban streets in Britain.

But it was the Hastings Rarities, to which the entire issue of *BB* in

August 1962 was devoted, that grabbed the headlines worldwide. Exposure of the fraud, seemingly perpetrated by a taxidermist in East Sussex in the early years of the twentieth century, resulted in 16 species being deleted from the British List and a staggering 600 rarities being struck from the record. Then-*BB* editor James Ferguson-Lees told *Nature* that, although he had a good idea who was behind this colossal hoax, he was more interested in putting the ornithological record straight than publicly unmasking the hoaxer.

## 100 years of British Birds on DVD-ROM

To mark the milestone of our centenary, *BB*, in partnership with the multimedia publisher BirdGuides, is publishing the entire 1907–2006 archive on a fully searchable DVD-ROM. *British Birds interactive* or *BBi* will be launched at the British Birdwatching Fair in August but BirdGuides ([www.birdguides.com](http://www.birdguides.com)) is taking orders now.

The retail price will be £99.00

but *BB* subscribers will be entitled to purchase *BBi* for £75, a saving of £24. That's the entire contents of *BB* on one disc! All the articles, all the photos, all the artwork, all the identification features, all the British Bird Rarities Committee annual reports. And all of this content will be fully searchable using the powerful software developed by BirdGuides for *BWpi* – Birds of the

Western Palearctic *interactive*.

So, if you want to read the original Note about 'Turnstones feeding on human corpse' or the entire account of how the Hastings Rarities were debunked, then *BBi* will be an unmissable addition to your DVD collection. And, as a loyal subscriber, you will qualify for the best price! See the full-page advert elsewhere in this issue.

## Cyprus follows Malta's lead and allows spring hunting of doves

Cyprus was named and shamed after joining Malta in blatant disregard for the EU Birds Directive. The Cypriot Government permitted two days of hunting for Turtle Doves *Streptopelia turtur*, on 6th and 9th of May. Ministers claim that the country's 45,000 hunters don't have enough opportunities to kill these birds in the autumn shooting season. This is despite the Government's own figures which show that between 19,000 and 30,000 Turtle Doves are shot on Cyprus in August and September each year.

Alistair Gammell, the RSPB's International Director, said: 'This

decision is a blatant two fingers to EU law, to hopes of helping this bird recover its numbers and to civilised common sense. The EU must leave the Cypriot Government in no doubt that playing fast and loose with EU laws and the future of this species is unacceptable.'

Turtle Dove numbers have dropped across Europe. The EU Birds Directive of 1979 bans shooting when birds are migrating to nesting sites, to safeguard their breeding efforts. Prospects for wild birds in Cyprus were improving as the Government began tackling the huge amount of illegal bird-trap-

ping in the country.

Meanwhile, Malta has cut short its spring hunting season for Turtle Dove and Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* by ten days. The season ended on 11th May in a surprise move by the Maltese Government as tensions escalated on the island between hunters and conservationists.

Happier news from Cyprus concerns two 'firsts' for Europe observed on the island in April: Dunn's Lark *Eremalauta dunni* and Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus*. See the BirdLife Cyprus website for photos of these birds: [www.birdlifecyprus.org](http://www.birdlifecyprus.org)

## Hen Harriers 'disappear' from the Yorkshire Dales

Illegal persecution of raptors may be widespread on Malta, but it has not been eradicated in the UK either. North Yorkshire Police are investigating the disappearance of the only nesting pair of Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus* in the Yorkshire Dales. The birds had produced a clutch of five eggs before they vanished.

The nesting site had been monitored by Yorkshire Dales Upland Bird Study Group volunteers since mid March and they raised the alarm when neither bird could be found on 23rd April. PC Mark Rasbeary of North Yorkshire Police and Steve Downing from the National Wildlife Crime Unit spent a full afternoon searching the moorland for signs of the harriers but all they found was the abandoned nest with five eggs inside. 'It is extremely rare for a female Hen Harrier to abandon her nest when she is sat on eggs because the male will provide her with food,' said PC Rasbeary. 'The only logical explanation is that the birds have been deliberately disturbed and driven away from the nest. Or even worse, they have been killed.'

## OSME summer meeting

*BB* readers are welcome to attend the summer meeting of the Ornithological Society of the Middle East & Central Asia on 7th July. One of the main talks will reveal the details of the amazing discovery of 1,600 Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius* in Syria and Turkey in January. Other talks will include reviews of recent ornithological developments in Egypt, Turkey, Oman and Lebanon, and updates on bird conservation work in the Middle East and Central Asia. There is no charge to attend, and the doors open at 10.45 hrs at the offices of ABTA, 68-71 Newman Street, London W1T 3AH (nearest Underground stations are Goodge St and Oxford Circus). More details at [www.osme.org](http://www.osme.org)

## Top wildlife cop sent back on the beat

The north of England's only full-time Wildlife Crime Officer is to become a beat bobby and his job 'civilianised'. In a cost-cutting move deplored by the RSPB and Northumberland Wildlife Trust, Northumbria Police has decided to replace PC Paul Henery with a desk-bound civilian who will co-ordinate the part-time wildlife crime detection of other officers scattered across Northumberland and Tyne & Wear.

The decision comes barely six months after PC Henery won the WWF Wildlife Law Enforcer of the Year Award, for which he was nominated by the Northumbria force. The nomination stated: 'PC Henery is an extremely dedicated, committed and professional WCO who has gained experience in dealing with wildlife crime over a number of years. He is supportive of partner agencies and police colleagues in carrying out his duties and has done much to raise awareness of wildlife crime locally and nationally.'

Now Northumbria Police has decided that PC Henery will be better deployed as a beat bobby. When the force's head of operations, Chief Superintendent Jim Campbell, was asked by BBC Look North if Badger *Meles meles* baiters and egg-collectors would now breathe more easily, he conceded that they probably would. PC Henery has also been active in tackling suspected persecution of Hen Harriers in Northumberland.

PC Henery has been Northumbria's Wildlife Crime Officer for nearly 15 years and has gained a high profile. He was the model for the BBC drama series *Badger* starring Jerome Flynn in 1999/2000, which was filmed in northeast England. And *BB* readers will also be familiar with his work in another sphere. PC Henery is a talented wildlife artist whose work has appeared on the cover of *BB* – and in 1998 he won the *BB* Bird Illustrator of the Year Award.

## Bernard Matthews picks up £600,000 after bird flu outbreak at his farm

The publication by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) of the final epidemiology report into the H5N1 avian influenza outbreak in Suffolk confirmed that the probable cause of infection was through imported meat products from Hungary. 'There was no evidence to support the hypothesis that wild birds were the source of the outbreak. This was based on the fact that there had been no isolations of H5N1 from wild birds in Europe during the 2006-07 wild-bird migration period and subsequent residency,' the report states.

The RSPB has expressed disappointment that the Bernard Matthews Company have used this report to call for further monitoring of wild birds, which have been exonerated as a vector in this outbreak. 'Calling for more work without acknowledging their readiness to contribute to the costs of a scheme designed to protect their industry reveals a worrying state of denial within the industry,' said Dr Mark Avery, the RSPB's Director of Conservation. 'The company stands to receive almost £600,000 in compensation (for healthy turkeys slaughtered alongside infected birds) while conservation charities shoulder the burden of surveillance with no cost to the poultry industry or Defra.'

The RSPB, along with other conservation charities, has been undertaking wild-bird surveillance since the autumn of 2005, at a cost to the RSPB alone of £170,000. Last month a comprehensive critical review of recent scientific literature on the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1, published in *Ibis*, concluded that poultry trade, rather than bird migration, is the main mechanism of global dispersal of the virus (see *Brit. Birds* 100: 312-313).



# Recent reports

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Eric Dempsey

This summary of unchecked reports covers early April to early May 2007.

**Blue-winged Teal** *Anas discors*, Firville Lake (Co. Tipperary), 25th April. **Lesser Scaup** *Aythya affinis* Clea Lakes (Co. Down), 11th April; Vane Farm (Perth & Kinross), 22nd–30th April; Eyebrook Reservoir (Leicestershire), 24th April to 3rd May; North Uist (Outer Hebrides), 30th April. **Barrow's Goldeneye** *Bucephala islandica* Quoile Pondage (Co. Down), long-stayer to at least 22nd April; Callander/Loch Venacher (Forth), long-stayer to 22nd April.

**White-billed Diver** *Gavia adamsii* Lewis (Outer Hebrides), 11th April, two on 13th and three on 14th, one remaining to 24th April, then two 1st May and one 2nd May; North Uist, 6th May. In Shetland, one at Burrafirth, Unst, 13th–14th April, perhaps same 30th April to 1st May; West Burra, two between 26th and 30th April; Kirkabister, Mainland, 1st–4th May; Fetlar, 30th April and a different bird there 1st May; Laxo, Mainland, long-stayer to 28th April. Mull (Argyll), 3rd May.

**Black-browed Albatross** *Thalassarche melanophrys* Sula Sgeir (Outer Hebrides), 8th–10th May at least.

**Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax* Stoford (Somerset), 5th May. **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* Radipole Lake (Dorset), two, 15th April; Lizard (Cornwall), 23rd April; Budleigh Salterton (Devon), long-stayer to 19th April. **Great White Egret** *Ardea alba* Norwich (Norfolk), 16th April; Marazion (Cornwall), 3rd May; Frampton-on-Severn (Gloucestershire), 10th May. **Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea* Minsmere (Suffolk), 28th April; near Sennen (Cornwall), 3rd May. **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* Leyland (Lancashire & N Merseyside), 2nd May. **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* Farrenfore (Co. Kerry), 19th April; Slimbridge/Frampton-on-Severn (Gloucestershire), 17, 20th April to 7th May, with at least two to 10th May; Hayle (Cornwall), three, 20th April; Lizard, up to seven, 21st April to 3rd May; Bridgewater (Somerset), four, 22nd April; West Alvington (Devon), 23rd and 30th April to 1st May; Braunton Burrows (Devon), 29th April; Sidlesham Ferry then Pagham Harbour (West Sussex), 30th April to 1st May; Pett Level (East Sussex), 5th May; near Reading (Berkshire), 6th May; Dungeness (Kent), 9th May; Marshside RSPB (Lancashire & N Merseyside), 9th May; Warton Marsh (Lancashire & N Merseyside), long-stayer to 9th May.

**Black Kite** *Milvus migrans* Aldeburgh (Suffolk), 22nd April; Aylmerton, Sheringham and Cley (all Norfolk), 22nd April, then at various localities in north Norfolk west to Titchwell, to 30th April; St Martin's, 22nd April, same St Mary's (both Scilly), to 29th April; near Bridge (Kent), 28th April; Botallack, 27th April, presumed same Kenidjack (both Cornwall), 1st May; Castleconnel (Co. Limerick), 27th April; Barnston area



157. Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*, Grafham Water, Cambridgeshire, May 2007.

John Carter



Nic Hallam

158. First-summer Bonaparte's Gull *Larus philadelphia*, Farmoor Reservoir, Oxfordshire, May 2007.

(Cheshire & Wirral), 29th–30th April; Beachy Head (East Sussex), 29th April; West Moors (Dorset), 29th April; Edmore (Somerset), 29th April; Ingleborough (North Yorkshire), 1st May; Christchurch (Dorset), 2nd May; Hickling Broad (Norfolk), 2nd May; Little Orton/Great Orton, presumed same Skinburness Marsh with the same or another Gelt Valley (all Cumbria), 2nd May; near Tiptree (Essex), 3rd May; Dembleby (Lincolnshire), 4th May; Wittering (Cambridgeshire), 6th May; Priory Country Park (Bedfordshire), 6th May; Aylmerton, 7th May; Earls Barton (Northamptonshire), 7th May; Coldstream (Borders), 8th May. White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* Llandegla Moors (Denbighshire), 13th April. Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* One of unknown origin at Scoulton, 28th April, then Warham (both Norfolk), 29th April. Short-toed Eagle *Circus gallicus* Barrow Gurney Reservoir (Somerset), 3rd May. Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* Stanhoe (Norfolk), 25th April; Dungeness, two, 3rd May with one to 4th May.

Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus* West Burra, long-stayer to 4th May. Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* Dawlish Warren (Devon), 16th April; Ferrybridge (Dorset), 4th May. American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*, Tacumshin (Co. Wexford), 15th–16th April and 1st May. Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla* Belfast Harbour (Co. Down), 9th May. Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii* Inner Marsh Farm (Cheshire & Wirral), 30th April. Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* Lough Beg (Co. Derry), 20th April; Mistley Walls (Essex/Suffolk), long-stayer to 13th April; Dundalk (Co. Louth), long-stayer to at least 26th April. Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa*

*flavipes* Clonakilty (Co. Cork), 26th–29th April; Kenchester Pools (Herefordshire), 28th April to 5th May; near Braintree (Essex), 1st May; Islay (Argyll), 6th May; Roscarberry (Co. Cork), long-stayer to at least 14th April. Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia* Blackditch (Co. Wicklow), 8th–9th May; Hayle Estuary, long-stayer to 3rd May. Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor* Grafham Water (Cambridgeshire), 4th–9th May.

Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla* Blennerville (Co. Kerry), 10th April; Benbecula (Outer Hebrides), 7th May; Exeter/Exe Estuary area (Devon), long-stayer to 30th April. Bonaparte's Gull *Larus philadelphia* Wicklow (Co. Wicklow), 23rd April; Tacumshin, 28th April to 9th May; Axe Estuary (Devon), 30th April; Farmoor Reservoir



Mark Breaks

159. Female 'Black-throated Thrush' *Turdus ruficollis atrogularis*, Fair Isle, Shetland, April 2007.



(Oxfordshire), 1st–8th May. **Glaucous-winged Gull** *Larus glaucescens* Beddington Sewage-farm (Greater London), 18th April, same as in Carmarthen in March 2007 and Gloucester in 2006. **Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica* Landguard (Suffolk), two, 1st May; Minsmere (Suffolk), 2nd May. **Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybrida* Lough Beg (Co. Cork) 29th–30th April. **Forster's Tern** *Sterna forsteri* Nimmo's Pier (Co. Galway), long-stayer to 2nd May.

**Snowy Owl** *Bubo scandiacus* Lewis, long-stayer to 14th April; North Uist, 21st April; Fort William (Highland), 26th April; St Kilda (Outer Hebrides), 8th May. **European Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster* Walland Marsh (Kent), seven, 22nd April; East Fleet (Dorset), 1st May; Treffynnon Pond (Pembrokeshire), 2nd May; near Sennen, 3rd May; St Agnes (Scilly), 3rd–5th May; Applecross, 5th May, perhaps same Forsinard, 7th May and Dalhavaig (all Highland), 9th May.

**Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla* Snettisham (Norfolk), 12th April. **Red-rumped Swallow** *Cecropis daurica* Collieston (North-east Scotland), 16th April; St Margaret's (Co. Dublin), 18th April; Lissagriffin (Co. Cork), 20th–21st April; Boulby Cliffs (Cleveland), 21st April; Dungeness, 21st April; Gibraltar Point (Lincolnshire), 22nd April and 6th–7th May; Landguard, 22nd and 25th April, and 1st May; Dunwich (Suffolk), 24th April; Pett Level (East Sussex), two, 28th April; Inchmerey (Hampshire), 1st May; Needs Ore Point (Hampshire),

1st May; St Agnes, 5th May. **Richard's Pipit** *Anthus richardi* Brean Down (Somerset), 15th April; Lytham Moss (Lancashire & N Merseyside), 24th April. **Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni* Hull (East Yorkshire), 22nd April. **Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus* Porthgwarra (Cornwall), 29th April. **'Black-headed Wagtail'** *Motacilla flava feldegg*, Lough Foyle (Co. Derry), 24th April.

**Black-eared Wheatear** *Oenanthe hispanica* Kilmelford (Argyll), 12th April. **Blue Rock Thrush** *Monticola solitarius* Elan (Powys), 11th April; Selsey Bill (West Sussex), 30th April. **'Black-throated Thrush'** *Turdus ruficollis atrogularis* Fair Isle (Shetland), 23rd April.

**Subalpine Warbler** *Sylvia cantillans* Lundy (Devon), 11th and 19th–20th April; Rame Head (Cornwall), 16th–17th April; North Ronaldsay (Orkney), 30th April, 4th and 8th May; Tarmon, Mullet Peninsula (Co. Mayo), 3rd May; Vatersay (Outer Hebrides), 3rd May; Bardsey (Gwynedd), 4th May. **Pallas's Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus proregulus* Freiston Shore (Lincolnshire), 7th May. **Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus* Newquay (Cornwall), long-stayer to 14th April. **Iberian Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus ibericus* Colney (Norfolk), 21st April to 9th May.

**'Balearic Woodchat Shrike'** *Lanius senator badius* Near Polgigga (Cornwall), 5th–9th May. **European Serin** *Serinus serinus* Portland Bill (Dorset), 12th, 16th, 18th, 29th April and 5th May; Hengistbury Head (Dorset), 15th April and 3rd May; Bridging Camp (Dorset), 21st April; Nanjizal (Cornwall), 22nd April; Hurst Spit (Hampshire), 27th April; South Walney (Cumbria), 4th–8th May; Dungeness, 6th May; Normandy (Hampshire), 5th May. **Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla* St Alban's Head (Dorset), 13th April; Fair Isle, 30th April; Amwell Gravel-pits (Hertfordshire), long-stayer to 17th April.



160. Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus ibericus*, Colney, Norfolk, May 2007.



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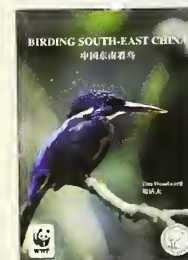
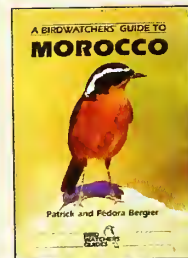
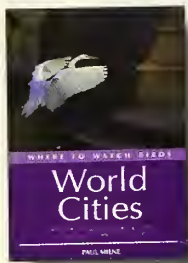
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www.bigbinoculars.co.uk

89(B) London Road, Morden, Surrey SM4 5HP

Tel: 020 8648 8822 Fax: 020 8687 2021

Email: info@kayoptical.co.uk

Open: Mon-Sat 9-5 (lunch 1-2)

**Location:** Southern edge of Greater London, 15 mins drive from M25.  
(for example via the A3, then take the A298 Wimbledon/Merton slip-road) or  
2 mins walk from Morden underground (turn right). See our website for a map.

**Parking:** 50 yards past our premises – first left

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## Field Days

Alternative venues to Morden at which you can try and buy our equipment in the field are given below. We aim to show our full range of equipment but it helps us to help you if you let us know your interests before each Field Day. Repairs can also be handed in/collected. 10.00am to 4.00pm usually.

### Sevenoaks

#### Wildfowl Reserve

On the A25 between Riverhead and Sevenoaks – Bot and Ball Station

1 July, 5 August

#### Pagham Harbour LNR

On the B2145 into Selsey, West Sussex

29 July, 26 August

#### College Lake Wildlife Centre

On the B488 near Bulbourne, Tring, Herts.

10 June, 12 August

### Dinton Pastures

#### Country Park

Near Reading (M4, A329(M) Woodley turnoff) then A329 to Winkersham and Winkersham Station (830300)

8 July, 23 Sept

#### Bough Beech Nature Reserve / Reservoir

About 4 miles south of the A25/A21 junction (access from B2042 or B2027) near Idle Hill, Kent. Info centre north of reservoir.

17 June, 15 July, 19 August, 16 Sept

Canon, Helios,

Kowa, Leica,

Monofrotto,

Miyouchi,

Nikon,

Opticon,

Optolyth,

Sentinel,

Swarovski,

Zeiss, etc.

Used items also  
on our web site.

For subsequent Field Day dates, phone or see our web site

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- Tour Leaders
- Website and IT Manager
- Marketing Manager

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Birders, botanists and particularly all-round naturalists sought to fill the above posts.

Meticulous attention to detail, accuracy, common sense, good literacy, numeracy, telephone skills and love of hard work are amongst the many skills required.

Fun-loving, outgoing and personable character essential!

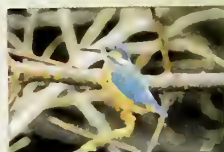
Please post typed CV and accompanying hand-written

letter to: **Naturetrek, Cheriton Mill, Arlesford,**

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8x42 Countryman	£199
10x42 Countryman	£209
8x42 Imagic BGA	£269
10x42 Imagic TGA	£149
8x42 Verano Oasis	£249
8x20 Gallery Mono Scope	£69.99



### Opticon Binoculars

8x42 BGA Classic	£369
10x42 BGA Classic	£379
8x42 DBA	£569
10x42 DBA	£569
8x42 DBA Monocular	£249
8x42 BGA Monocular	£139
New Imagic SE	- See Web



### Zeiss Binoculars

8x32 T FL	- See Web
7x42 T FL	£819
8x42 T FL	£839
10x42 T FL	£869
Green or Black available	
8x42 Conquest	£529



### Leica Binoculars

Ultravid 8x32 BR	- See Web
Ultravid 8x42 BR	- See Web
Ultravid 10x42 BR	- See Web
Ultravid 8x50 BR	£1129
Tinovid 8x42BN	- See Web
Tinovid 10x42 BN	- See Web



### Swarovski Binoculars

8x32 EL	£839
8.5x42 EL	£939
10x42 EL	£989

### Swarovski Scopes

Swarovski ATS 80 HD, case, zoom	£1539
Swarovski ATS 65 HD	
All in stock - call for best price	



### Accessories

Zeiss Rainguard	£10.99
Leica Rainguard	£15.99
Op Tech Neck Strap	£10.99
Op Tech Tripod Strap	£19.99
Car Window Mount	£42
Manfrotto Hide Mount	£49
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### Tripods

Velbon Carbon Fibre 635 - 157 Head	£179
Velbon Carbon Fibre 535 - 157 Head	£159
Velbon CX586	£59.99
Velbon UP4000 Monopod	£19.99
Manfrotto VIEW Tripods from	£129
SLIK D3	£119
Wide range Velbon and Manfrotto in stock.	

### Opticon Scopes

New ES80ED, 20-60 Zoom HDF, Case	£599
GS665 ED, Zoom, Case	£569
Mighty Midget 2 with 15-40 Zoom	£219
NEW SDL Super Zoom	£229
GS665, HDF Zoom, Case	£459
22x60 Angled Spotting Scope	£159

### Zeiss Scopes

See web for full range	
Diapscope 85 TF L:	
with 20-60 Zoom, case	£1129
with 30xVWV	£1049
Diapscope 65 TF L:	
with 15-45 Zoom	£899
with 30xVWV	£849

### Leica Scopes

Leica APO Televiz 77	- See Web
with 20-60 Zoom, case	- See Web
with 32xVWV, case,	
Leica APO Televiz 62	- See Web
with 16-48 Zoom, Case	- See Web
with 26xVWV Case	- See Web
Digital Adapter 2	£138



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SOUTH WEST  
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30 Jul, 3 Dec

## Argentina – Chaco

10 days - £1,490  
Departs 15 Jan, 5 Mar, 15 Apr,  
6 Aug, 10 Dec

## Australia – Endemics of WA

12 days - £1,990  
Departs 14 & 28 Sep

## Bolivia – Lowlands

10 days - £1,295  
Departs 11 Feb, 11 Nov

## Bolivia – Highlands

12 days - £1,495  
Departs 18 Feb, 18 Nov

## Botswana

10 days - £1,550  
Departs 16 Nov

## Brazil

10 days - £1,395  
Departs 23 Mar, 5 Oct

## Cuba

12 days - £1,790  
Departs 10 Mar

## Ecuador – Chocó

9 days - £1,345  
Departs 24 Nov

## Ecuador – Tumbesian Endemics

9 days - from £1,250  
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## Ecuador –

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9 days - from £1,195  
Departs 16 Jan, 10 & 24 Feb,  
17 Mar, 23 Aug, 20 Oct, 17 Nov

## Ethiopia

10 days - from £1,195  
Departs 9 Feb, 6 Apr, 9 Nov,  
21 Dec

## Ethiopian Endemics

10 days - £1,195  
Departs 16 Feb, 13 Apr, 16 Nov

## Florida

9 days - £1,195  
Departs 16 Feb

## Gambia

12 days - £1,090  
Departs 26 Oct

## India – Birds & Mammals

9 days - £1,250  
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16 Nov

## India – Bharatpur & Chambal

9 days - from £1,250  
Departs 10 Feb, 20 Oct, 26 Dec

## India – Endemic Birds of Anaimalai

9 days - £1,150  
Departs 3 Feb, 24 Nov

## India – Family Tour

9 days - £1,345  
Departs 10 Feb, 20 Oct

## India – Goa

9 days - £1,195  
Departs 16 Nov

## India – Kerala

9 days - £1,250  
Departs 10 Mar, 17 Nov

## India – Southern India's Endemics

12 days - from £1,395  
Departs 10 Mar, 17 Nov,  
22 Dec

## India – Wildlife & Cuisine

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Departs 10, 17 & 24 Feb,  
3 Mar, 10 Nov, 1 Dec

## Kazakhstan

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Departs 10 & 18 May

## Kenya

10 days - £1,450  
Departs 9 Nov

## Namibia

10 days - £1,395  
Departs 19 Jan, 9 Feb

## Nepal

10 days - from £1,395  
Departs 27 Jan, 10 Feb, 7 Apr,  
22 Dec

## Nepal – Ibisbill Trek

10 days - £1,395  
Departs 5 May

## Panama – Canopy Tower

9 days - £1,525  
Departs 18 & 25 Apr, 7 Nov

## South Africa

10 days - £1,450  
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## South Africa's Cape

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Departs 16 Mar, 17 & 24 Aug

## South Africa – Zululand

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## Sri Lanka

10 days - £1,295  
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## Thailand

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## Uganda

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Departs 8 Mar,  
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## Venezuela – Off the Beaten Track

9 days - £1,295  
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## Venezuela – Andean Endemics

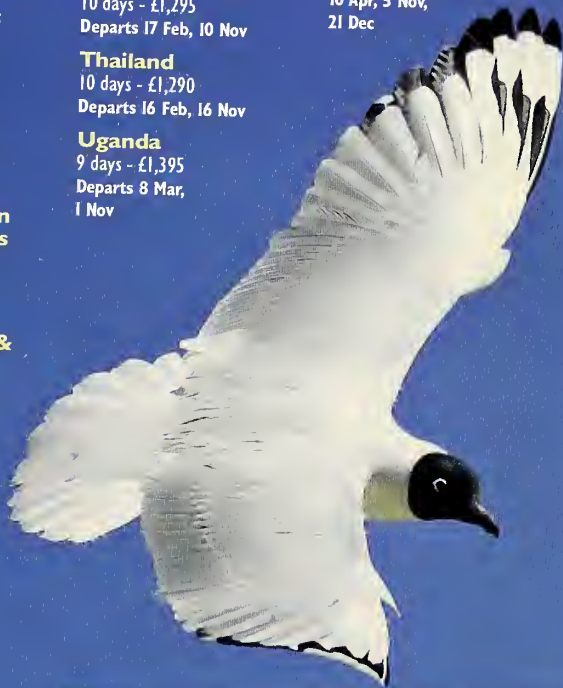
9 days - £1,495  
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## Venezuela – Llanos

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21 Dec



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